

**ON-LINE NETWORKS, SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SOCIAL
INTEGRATION: A CASE STUDY OF ON-LINE COMMUNITIES IN
MALAYSIA**

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the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology
in the University of Canterbury**

by

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Abstract

In 1996, Malaysia developed a national ICT policy intending to establish on-line community networks amongst all citizens as part of the agenda to prepare the nation to become a mainstream knowledge-based society and economy. As a country that has historically experienced uneasy tension between inter-ethnic social relationships, this research seeks to explore whether on-line social networking affects the forms of social capital and social integration found amongst diverse on-line ethnic communities (Malay, Chinese and Indian) in Malaysia. Six on-line communities were selected as case studies and the research was carried out in two stages. The first stage involved interviewing three different groups of participants: on-line community administrators, Government representatives and the general public; the second stage was a web-based survey of on-line participants. The findings suggest that the six selected on-line communities in this study show great potential for enhancing social networks and social capital across all members of different ethnicities. However, these are not significant enough to create social integration across all ethnic communities. Instead, three different trends of bonding and bridging social capital emerged across the six selected on-line communities. The first trend shows bridging social capital throughout both on-line and off-line activities in MalaysiaMAYA.com (social networking site), SARA (residential-based) and FamilyPlace.com (parenting and children). The second trend indicates that bridging networks were limited to on-line communication as seen in both residentially-based communities (USJ Subang Jaya and PJNet). In contrast, VirtualFriends.net (social networking site) only demonstrates bonding social capital developed in both on-line and off-line social networking. Considering these diverse patterns, it is argued that transferring bridging social capital from an on-line medium to an off-line medium is challenging. Factors of cultural capital such as language use and cultural and religious observations have been highlighted as significant in shaping community networking patterns. Overall, the issue of ethnic integration in the context of on-line communities in Malaysia remains, at best, a challenging factor for the formation of on-line/ off-line social capital.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1. 0 Introduction

During recent years, advances in computing technology, especially the Internet, have greatly influenced the way social networks have been defined and work to connect people. The Internet, the origin of which can be found in ARPANET¹ (Castells, 2003), has become essential in today's society. E-mail is the first and still the most frequently used communication tool on the Internet (Preece, et al., 2003). The Internet has rapidly expanded to make more efficient use of connectivity by introducing various new forms of communication techniques such as bulletin boards, chat systems and instant messaging. The latest technologies brought about by this invention include the emergence of the Internet telephone (SKYPE), streaming video, photographs, blogs (i.e. web logs) and wikis². All of these new mechanisms encourage the acceleration of information exchange and allow more people to connect effectively.

¹ ARPANET is a former Internet network set up by the Advanced Research Project Agency (ARPA) in September 1969 in the USA.

² Wikis are an open source collaborative server technology that enables users to access, browse and edit Hyper Text pages in real time contact (Preece, et al., 2003).

Networking serves as an important function of the Internet. Therefore, the Internet has brought into existence a new feature of social networking structures, known as an on-line network. On-line networking becomes more advanced in parallel with the fast developments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). On-line networking can act as a foundation for the establishment of an on-line community: a group of people who interact, communicate and perform activities in a virtual medium (Rheingold, 1994). The use of the Internet to form cyber social groups has changed the nature of community from physically confined into on-line social networks, which Wellman (1999a), a social scientist, calls one of “networked individualism”. Through on-line links, people are connected as individuals or groups, available for contact anywhere and at any time. According to Wellman (1999a), instead of knowing only their own neighborhood community members, each person is now becoming “an individualized switchboard, linking a unique set of ties and networks” (p.49).

Similarly, Lin (2001), a social networks expert, argues in line with Wellman’s work that people’s social networks increasingly rely on the electronic medium. Without diminishing the importance of face-to-face contact, ICTs, according to Lin (2001) transform conventional social networks into “cyber networks” (p.212) – a new form of social contact system that are created and developed in cyberspace. The flexibility of the Internet provides an opportunity for connections to be made across different types of networks. Also, they reinforce existing networks and help to build social capital, which according to Lin, is an asset in human networks.

Social capital is an imprecise social construct that has emerged from a rather murky swamp of terminology, but it is still useful for exploring culture, society and social networks. The notion of social capital originated from studies of conventional or temporal communities and highlights the importance of networks in building strong personal relationships that develop over time. Such relationships, it is argued, provide a basis for trust, cooperation, and collective action. Basically, there is no explicit definition of social capital because it can be described in relatively different dimensions and points of views. However, in order to discriminate social capital from physical and human capital, Putnam (2000) has offered a useful definition. While physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals;

social capital refers to the connections among individuals, their social networks, their norms of reciprocity, and the trust that arises from these.

Since the availability of on-line social networks, an array of topics has emerged concerning on-line communities and social capital. One of the areas of interest was the impact of on-line social networking on social capital and community participation. It is argued that such an issue is important for helping us to better understand how and why we interact with each other, as well as how new technologies can alter people's interactions. Past research has demonstrated a huge potential for on-line networks in connecting individuals and groups. These connections are believed to enable and strengthen social capital and create robust social relationships among members on-line and also off-line. Research by Pinkett (2003), for instance, illustrates how the presence and use of ICTs have subsequently helped an African-American community in Camfield Estate, Boston, to build and recreate positive inter-relationships amongst the other community members. Similarly, a study by Ferlander (2003) highlights the positive impact of on-line communication on social integration within local communities. Following this, the Internet has been described as tool in providing a place for public discussion and support, as well as being a source for acquiring information. Likewise, Hampton and Wellman (1999 & 2001) in their research on the impact of ICTs' applications in the neighborhood of Netville, Toronto, have found that an on-line network can build strong on-line and off-line relationships among neighbors. It can also develop trust and a sense of belonging.

Past research demonstrates that on-line communication and activities may have a significant impact on uniting and recreating social relationships across communities. However, most of the research studies focus on the networks that occur within a homogenous community. Without focusing on socio-cultural factors, many studies may fail to notice various other influences which could potentially affect the way social relationships develop between members of a community. Considering aspects of diversity such as ethnicity, class and gender may result in different discoveries in terms of social relationship patterns and the type of social capital that emerges. Researching on-line networks across heterogeneous communities would give a new dimension to how technologies both reinforce and change patterns of social relations and community practices in order to grasp how these diverse groups of people manage to negotiate their

relationships in both on-line and off-line activities. Considering these gaps, this current research aims to explore the role of on-line networks in developing social capital across multi-ethnic communities. More importantly, it endeavors to see whether on-line social capital does help to accelerate a process of social integration between different ethnic groups and thus the role it plays in the development of a plural society in Malaysia.

1.1 Malaysian Plural Society: Some Background

1.1.1 Demographic

Malaysia is the Asian country that came into official existence as a political and geographical entity in September 1969. Strategically located in the heart of South East Asia, the country covers an area of 329,750 km² and consists of two geographical regions divided by the South China Sea, bordering Thailand in the North, Singapore in the South, and Indonesia and Brunei from Borneo Island (Malaysia, 2008). Malaysia comprises 13 states, 11 of which are on the Peninsula (Perlis, Kedah, Pulau Pinang, Perak, Terengganu, Pahang, Selangor, Melaka (Malacca), Negeri Sembilan and Johor); and two others (Sabah and Sarawak) are situated in the northern part of Borneo. Kuala Lumpur (KL) is Malaysia's capital city and it forms the core of the nation's most populous urban area.



Figure 1.1: Malaysia within the Asian Continent

The Malaysian population today is 27,120,717 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2009). The most populous region is on the Peninsula (20 million) and the remaining 7 million live on the island of Borneo (Sabah and Sarawak), which are the largest but less densely-populated states (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 2007). Malaysia is well-known as a multi-racial society comprised of different ethnic groups (Malaysia, 2008; Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 2007). Malays encompass a majority, close to 52% of the population. About a quarter (30%) of Malaysians are ethnic Chinese (Malaysian Chinese descent) and 8% Indians. There are also various non-Malay indigenous groups combined to make-up approximately 7% of the population. This group is divided into dozens of ethnic groups with some general cultural similarities. Most of them reside in Sabah and Sarawak but they also exist in much smaller numbers on the Peninsula, where they are collectively called *orang asli* (native people). In Malaysia, the Malay and the non-Malay indigenous groups are considered as *Bumiputra* (sons of the soil), referring to the original people of the country. Other population groups include those of Indonesian, European, Middle Eastern, Cambodian, Thai and Vietnamese descent. The settlers of these groups came via foreign colonization, as war refugees and legal or illegal migrants.

1.1.2 Immigrant History: Two Important Phases

The First Phase

Historically, *Tanah Melayu* (the Malay land), the former name for Malaysia, descended from old Malay heritage where all the people spoke the Malay language and were strongly influenced by Malay cultural systems and traditions which were preserved through generations. Before the arrival of foreign influence, *Tanah Melayu* or *Malaya* (the period before 1963) was occupied only by the indigenous and homogenous Proto Malay tribes whose ancestors came from mainland Southeast Asia and the Indonesian islands around 2000 B.C. The Malays remained as the only settlers in the country at least until the year 1400 A.D. (Baharuddin, 1997). Under the Malay Sultanate from 1411 onwards, there was a gradual flow of foreign migrants with the development of trade in the port of Malacca on the Malay Peninsula. During this phase,

the plurality of society in *Tanah Melayu* was influenced by such factors as religious and political marriages.

The port of Malacca, which is geographically situated between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, serves as a strategic location for international traders as a route to Southeast Asia and the Middle East. For at least a century, Malacca has been acknowledged as a great business hub in the Southeast region. Until the fifteenth century, the power of the Malay people was widely recognized for their ability to dominate political and economic sectors in the Malacca Straits. The fame of Malay identity rose when the Malay language became a *lingua franca*, widely spoken by all international traders and travelers including the Europeans who came to Malacca. Not only popular as a trading centre, Malacca became a region of culture, famous for its Islamic study. Replacing Hinduism, the religion of Islam is believed to have originally been brought into the country by traders and religious specialists from Persia, India and China. Both these trade and cultural factors attracted more foreigners, some of whom settled in Malacca. These factors contributed to the early phase of multi-culturalism in *Tanah Melayu*.

Many Indian-Muslim traders married local Malays, establishing an Indian-Muslim community. The sovereignty and the great power of the Malay Sultanate were accepted by the Chinese Emperor and Siamese King. In order to show their respect and as a symbol of friendship, the Chinese Emperor let his daughter, Princess Hang Li Po, marry the Sultan of Malacca. Princess Hang Li Po brought 300 Chinese maidens with her to *Tanah Melayu*. This event marked the early settlement of ethnic Chinese in *Tanah Melayu* (Baharuddin, 1997). The Chinese later intermarried with local people and developed their own unique community called *Babas* and *Nyonyas*. Unlike other ethnic Chinese communities, *Babas* and *Nyonyas* reflect a strong Malay influence in their culture and identity formation, especially in the way they dress and use a Malay language in everyday conversation.

The fame and success of the port of Malacca attracted several European groups who wanted to control trade and sought new colonies on the Asian continent. Due to the pressure of the Industrial Revolution, which was a strong influence in the Western nations, many of the foreign powers came to Asia on a three-fold mission of “Gold, Glory and God”. Apart from establishing international trade and searching for new

resources, they also sought to discover a new opportunity to spread Christianity to the locals. The arrival of the Europeans in Malacca in the early sixteenth century marked the beginning of the second phase of ethnic immigration in *Tanah Melayu*.

The Second Phase

The glory of Malaya ended in 1511 when Malacca fell to the superior weaponry and modern army of the Portuguese. Since then, *Tanah Melayu* was handed from one colonial power to another in a process that lasted for about 400 years (Kling, 1986). When the European colonials came and monopolized the Malacca Straits and its trade, the power of Malays declined. After Portugal, *Tanah Melayu* was under the administration of the Dutch, British and Japanese. The Malay Monarchy was separated into smaller units whereby the *bangsawan* (or Royals) along with their culture and intellect, were gradually dismissed.

The settlement of the British in 1874 brought a massive influx of immigrants from China and India (Kling, 1986; Baharuddin, 2008). This marked a significant change in the demographic composition of the country. During this time, the Malays, along with their traditional cultural systems, were highly threatened. They almost lost their honor, identity and also political power not only to the colonial powers but also to these new immigrants.

The arrival of Chinese and Indian immigrants in the middle of Malaya's crisis of political, economic and cultural power offered a new dimension to the country. Under Britain's new policy known as "divide and rule", the three ethnic groups – Malays, Chinese and Indians – were physically separated. The Malays were asked to remain in the rural areas carrying out activities based on agriculture and farming, while the Chinese were brought into towns and cities to be involved in business or as miners. The Indians were placed in the plantation areas and most of them worked as estate laborers. The separation of the three ethnic groups was seen by the British as an important strategy to avoid unity that could create resistance towards their power and authority. Both the Chinese and Indians settlers helped new economic opportunities to be achieved, which were of massive benefit to the British colonials. In contrast, the

presence of these ethnic groups and the way they controlled the country's wealth and spaces deeply disrupted economic and social life among the Malays (Pek Khoo, 1998).

Under British rule, many new towns emerged with new social infrastructures and facilities, changing the rural landscape to accommodate new economic mining activities that largely replaced the traditional Malay economy. Ironically, all the new towns were settled by the immigrants, mostly Chinese, while at the same time the Malays, as the original dwellers, were gradually deurbanized to the rural areas (Hussien, 1986). The Chinese in Malaya were free to practice their cultural behavior and economic and political systems because they were given considerable independence by the colonial authorities from the early days of their arrival.³ Therefore, by the year 1941, the Chinese population in Malaya exceeded that of the Malays by 43 to 41% (Pek Khoo, 1998). This challenged the rights and priority of the Malays as the original people. Moreover, the immigrants outnumbering the Malay population reduced opportunities for many tertiary educated Malays to take part in the new modernization phase. Until the late 1960s, about "85-90% of new intellectuals and professionals came from the immigrants groups, with only 15% of them Malays" (Hussien, 1986; p.16). With this strength in economic power and education, the immigrants were dominant in every aspect of the country's socio-economic sectors. Even today in terms of economic domination, the Malays are still recognized as second class citizens compared to their non-Malay equivalents. In comparison to the wealthy non-Malays who mostly reside in major capital cities and towns, many Malays are still poor and left behind, primarily involved in rural economic activities.

1.2 The Independence of Malaya and the Rise of Class and Integration Issues

Malaya officially fell by the hand of the Japanese army on 15 February 1942. Even though the new regime ruled the country for less than 4 years, it had a significant impact on the country's social landscape, especially in the context of social relationships between Malays and ethnic Chinese. During Japanese rule, there was increasing intimidation between the two ethnic groups, which later gave rise to the spirit

³ This occurred from the middle of the nineteenth century until World War II.

of nationalism for the Malays (Baharuddin, 1997). Even though both the Malays and Chinese suffered under the Japanese administration, the Chinese endured the most hardship and distrust by the Japanese. This was due to the fact that Mainland Chinese had been fighting the Japanese in China a few years before (in 1937) and they (the Japanese) believed that the Malaya Chinese continued to have allegiances with their country of origin (Kling, 1986).

Hostility between Malays and Chinese was even further aggravated when the Japanese started to appoint local Malays to help in administrative sectors whilst the Chinese were still oppressed. Thousands of Chinese were killed by the Japanese at that time. This discrimination experienced by the Chinese increased the bitterness between the ethnic groups. As a result, many Chinese left their homes and escaped to the countryside and wooded areas. Most of them joined the Communist party in the Malay Peninsula with allegiance to the Chinese Communist Party of China. Upon the surrender of the Japanese in 1945, the Chinese Communist Party known as the 3 Star Party or *Bintang Tiga* took over the country and ruled for 14 days from August 15-30, 1945 (Comber, 2007). This period is remembered by all Malaysians as a most cruel and vicious period of rule by the Malaya Communist Party. Being the only fully armed, equipped and organized body, the communists took the opportunity to attack the Malays before the return of British military forces. This marked the beginning of changes in interracial feelings between the Chinese and Malays.

The return of the British to Malaya in the aftermath of the Second World War in 1945 witnessed a huge destruction in social facilities and infrastructures, propelling Malaya's socio-economic condition into a rather poor direction. In order to set up a national recovery strategy, in 1946 the British introduced a new administrative system called the Malayan Union (Baharuddin, 1997; Comber, 2007). The Malayan Union was conceived as a way to unify the 11 states in the Malay Peninsula under a single Government to simplify administration. The policy underlying the Malayan Union, however, largely involved the issue of an immigrant's nationality and the special rights of Malays. The Malayan Union intended to give equal rights to those who wished to apply for citizenship. Immigrants and their children who were born in *Tanah Melayu* or Singapore and were living there before 15 February 1942 were automatically granted citizenship. On the other hand, the Malayan Union was meant to reduce the power of

the Malay rulers by replacing them with British residents. This was due to the accusations of collaboration between Malay rulers during the Japanese occupation (Comber, 2007).

Malays generally opposed the formulation of the Malayan Union due to the fact that their special rights would be under scrutiny with the reduction of the Sultan's power. The decision to grant free citizenship to immigrants and their descendants was highly resisted, not only because of their racial and religious difference, but also because of their economic dominance which was seen as a threat to the Malays. The Malayan Union was called off after failing to gain support from Malays and was replaced with the Federation of Malaya agreement in 1948. Since the Malayan Union was proposed, Malays started to realize the importance of unity and the need to fight for their rights and sustainability. This sense of nationalism was one of the main reasons that led to the formation of the first Malay political party, known as the United Malay National Organization (UMNO). Until today, the UMNO remains the main Malay political channel that keeps mobilizing mass support and participation from its members, aimed towards protecting the rights of Malays in the country.

After years of struggle, Malaya finally gained its independence from Britain on the 31st August 1957 with the following conditions (Comber, 2007):

- i) Special rights are given to Malays,
- ii) Malay is the main national language,
- iii) Islam is the official religion,
- iv) The special powers of the Sultans are to be maintained and
- v) Citizenship is given to immigrants based on the acceptance by the immigrant of the special privileges and position of the Malays and the Sultans.

Since the return of the British to Malaya, almost all the Chinese members of the *Bintang Tiga* Party moved into the jungle and continued their rebellion from there. This led to 12 years of emergency rule (1948-1960) and is remembered as a period of intense racial conflict and a distrust of the Chinese by the Malays.

The special rights of Malays, as stated in the national Constitution of 1957, were never recognized by the other ethnic groups in the country (Baharuddin, 1997). In 1965,

Singapore, which was formally a part of the Malaysia coalition developed in 1963, left the country to become an independent state. With its predominantly Chinese population, Singapore objected to the special privileges of the Malays. Another significant and often recalled event was the racial riot that broke out on May 13, 1969 between the Chinese and Malays. Malay-Chinese relations became intense a few weeks before the national 1969 election due to lack of restrictions of the scope and subject for campaigning (Comber, 2007). This led to a serious conflict whereby the non-Malays had openly challenged the issue of national language and the special rights of Malays. The race riot between both ethnic groups risked many civilian lives and caused huge damage to properties in the city of Kuala Lumpur.

The May 13th tragedy led into some affirmative action towards ethnic integration in Malaysia. *Rukunegara* (similar to Indonesian *Pancasila*) was developed to govern the state on August 31, 1970. A new ideology, it consisted of five general principles; Belief in God, Loyalty to the King and country, Supremacy of the Constitution, Rule of Law and mutual respect for good behavior, and morality which should be observed by all citizens (Kling, 1986; Comber 2007). *Rukunegara* serves as a foundation for society in the country to integrate and achieve national unity.

1.2.1 The New Economic Policy (NEP)

“The Tunku, the father of Independence was rather extreme and decided at one time that all the Malays wanted was to become government servants and all the Chinese wanted was to become businessman. I disputed that, I felt that the Chinese and Malays wanted to become government servants and businessmen as well. So there was conflict. He said there was no conflict, but there was a conflict. He said there was harmony I said there was no harmony. But the Tunku would not hear it. He was by that time so far removed that he could not hear the rumblings on the ground. I did not ask the Malays be given everything. I was for sharing provided it was equitable sharing. So we evolved the New Economic Policy, the thrust of which was to eradicate poverty and to distribute wealth on more equitable basis between the races.”

(Mohamad, 1982; p.100)

The Malay political leaders knew that a stable state of affairs in a multi-ethnic society such as Malaysia was dependant on economic equilibrium and a sense of social balance across ethnic groups. Therefore, to ensure a more stable and enduring arrangement for the future, the Malaysian Government, lead by Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, introduced a New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1970. The NEP document provided hope that all members of society could get their fair share of the economic pie and was thus designed with the purpose of achieving the following two-fold objectives (Mohamad, 1998):

1. Foster national unity and nation building by eradicating poverty, raising income levels and increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians irrespective of race. This process involves the modernization of rural life, a rapid and balanced growth of urban activities and the creation of a Malay commercial and industrial community in all categories and at all levels of operation so that Malays and other indigenous people would become full partners in all aspects of economic life of the nation.
2. Restructure the society to correct economic imbalance, so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function.

The underlying strategy of the NEP, as clearly stated in the policy objectives, was to deal adequately with the problems of socio-economic imbalance that were significantly evident between the ethnic groups. The Malaysian Government believed that social and economic progress could only be achieved through political stability and an appropriate solution to resolve the disparity that existed among the different ethnic groups. This was evident in the May 13th incident where inequality in economic and income distribution, opportunity and wealth amongst ethnic groups, especially between Chinese and Malays, resulted in disintegration, insecurity and social pressure. The Malays sometimes feel that they are far behind other races when it comes to controlling their own country's economy. Therefore, the NEP was seen by the Government as an appropriate action to redress the economic imbalances between the ethnic groups. The NEP was further elaborated and incorporated as the foundation of the Second (1971-5), Third (1976-80), Fourth (1981-5) and Fifth of the Malaysia Plans (1986-90) that guided the socio-economic development of the country.

To the Malays, the NEP is not a source of pride but a necessity for achieving economic integration and stability. Although the formulation of the NEP may be perceived as unfair by many Chinese, the Malays maintained that as long as their own economic strength was not of equal standing with the Chinese, they are entitled to the following (Baharuddin, 1997):

1. Quotas and preferences in public administration and diplomatic services positions.
2. Reservation of certain lands for exclusive ownership and use by Malays.
3. Preference in securing licenses, business permits, special scholarships and entry into institutions of higher education.

After 30 years of implementation, the NEP has generated both positive and negative consequences for Malaysian society. On the positive side, the NEP has helped to improve social mobility amongst the *Bumiputras*, bringing about a more multi-ethnic workforce in the private sector, which was previously dominated by non-Malays and has helped to expand the *Bumiputras* range of skills and expertise especially in the professional, commercial and industrial sectors. However, the introduction of the NEP was also claimed to further worsen the class issue as many non-Malays perceived the NEP as a prejudiced *pro-Bumiputra* policy. The non-Malays felt discriminated against as they had to sacrifice more in order for the Government to achieve the objective of helping the Malays. An example of this was the way the NEP set rigid quotas and limited the access of the Chinese and Indian population to universities, public jobs and public money, in order to make way for the *Bumiputra*-Malays (Abdullah & Pedersen, 2006). Moreover, in order to help Malays become involved in businesses, financial assistance was provided by local financial institutions and investment firms. These privileges were not provided for Chinese or Indians.

Following the NEP, many critics see the policy implementation as rather racist and far from integrating all groups. Johan Saravanamuttu (2004), a Malaysian-Indian scholar, argued that national integration amongst ethnicities seems to be merely rhetoric, utterly remote and inaccessible because Malaysia's emphasis on *Bumiputra* rights and Islam as highlighted in the NEP and National Constitutions delimits its multi-cultural discourse and practices in the country. For Saravanamuttu, Malaysian multi-culturalism differs from that practiced in the West because Malaysia has been embedded in ethnic politics and policies "from day one" (p.89). Vejai

Balasubramaniam (2004) argues that the policy led to the emergence of a Malay middle class that has further increased what he calls the “petit bourgeois” group (p.147). This group is argued to be the principal beneficiary of communalism, who has worked towards strengthening only the communalism (of the Malays) in the Malaysian political system.

1.2.2 The Rights of Malays and Cultural Issues

Overall, the essence of differences and prejudices between ethnic groups in Malaysia is best reflected in how the non-Malays see Malaysia as a country which is dominated by “Malay ethno-nationalism” (Boon Kheng, 2004) and, through it compromised. The major symbols of Malay nationalism are “Islam and the Malay language” (p.3). Malaysian politics, which continues to be ruled politically by Islam and by Malay UMNO-led *Barisan Nasional*⁴ government leaders, it is argued, will determine the national agendas. This means that Malay privileges will continue and this will further raise non-Malays’ fears over the threat of an extremist Islamic state emerging and a Malay dominant culture. The non-Malays, from the day the country achieved its independence, have strived for equality in every aspect of life with Malays. They claim that as citizens of Malaysia they also work hard in developing and contributing to the country’s wealth, and hence should be treated equally with the Malays and other *Bumiputras*.

From the Malays point of view, enforcing traditional culture and practices in their own land was not meant to assimilate the other ethnic groups into the Malay cultural system. It was actually to remind the migrants about their history and the importance of their origins to express and form national development and culture based on their original identity. The Malays as an original people believe that they are the ones that should embrace the country’s political power and should never let it go again as happened to their ancestors in the colonial period. In the minds of Malays, it is all about the survival of the nation, protecting their rights as legitimate owners of Malay land.

⁴ *Barisan Nasional* is comprised of 3 different alliance parties – UMNO, MCA (Malaysia Chinese Association) and MIC (Malaysia Indian Congress).

The ability of Malays to control economic and intellectual factors has consequently influenced the immigrant groups to feel marginalized, paralleled with an effort to replace traditional culture with something more neutral and plural in character (Hussien, 1986). Many factors, including the English language, which has been widely taught and used since colonial times, were seen as initially helping the process to counterbalance the culture and heritage of the Malays. Since the opposition parties⁵ won the 12th national election in March 2008, the non-Malays are now seen increasingly as brave enough to question and manipulate historical facts. They challenged the National Constitution which was claimed to be “racist” and biased towards Malays. Currently, there are about 20 issues that have been created by the non-Malays to attack the Malays and simultaneously provoke ethnic conflicts in the country (Abdullah, 2010). Amongst the issues which were indicated by the Malays as actions of “Malays bashing” were: the Hidraf petition, fictitious *Halal* certificates, racist allegations towards *Biro Tatanegara*, a road sign issue, conversion laws and the latest was the use of the title “Allah” (Muslim’s God) amongst non-Muslims.

The debate on racial polarization in Malaysian society remains unresolved. Nowadays, even though the three major ethnic groups seem to be able to live together, suspicion, skepticism and prejudice still occur amongst these groups of people. For example, each ethnic group tends to interact only with their own people, send their children to their own stream (language based) schools and still retain connections to their countries of origin. Since the country gained national independence in 1957, the Malaysian Government has put a great deal of effort into improving social relationships between groups. Initiatives such as solidarity campaigns and setting up “Vision Schools”⁶ though, regrettably, have been less than well-received and not much change or improvement has taken place in society.

⁵The opposition parties are combination of 3 parties: Democratic Alliance Politic, KEADILAN and PAS or *Parti Islam Semalaya* (Malay Political Party).

⁶Vision Schools are primary schools with the concept of children learning together within an area regardless of race and religion. Under this concept, two or three primary schools of different streams are placed in the same area. Each school will have its own building which can be joined to the other schools by a link-way. The aims and objectives of Vision Schools are: (1) To foster solidarity among the pupils of different races and backgrounds; (2) To instill a spirit of integration among pupils of different streams; (3) To produce a generation that is tolerant and understanding so as to realize a united nation; and (4) To encourage maximum interaction among pupils through the sharing of school facilities and implementation of other activities in school (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2005).

1.3 On-line Communities: A New Integration Solution?

Differences in class, religion and culture (including language and lifestyle) as well as the social, economic and political gaps have made it more difficult for ethnic communities to communicate effectively. However, the existence of the Internet and other sophisticated communication tools can be seen as an alternative way to encourage social interaction between different groups of people. Available evidence, particularly from various studies conducted in the context of Western society, indicates that on-line communication is effective in maintaining weak ties, which otherwise, “would be lost in the trade-off between the effort to engage in physical interaction (including telephone interaction) and the value of the communication” (Castells, 2003; p.129). Furthermore, communication through on-line forums, e-mail and chatting, for instance, was claimed to be free from the bias of social differences, including educational achievement and economic background.

The existence of the 1996 Malaysia ICT Policy informs the Government’s commitment towards implementing new technology in every aspect of the development agenda. The ICT strategy, as stated in the policy, has two main programs: The National IT Agenda (NITA) and the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC). The MSC predominantly focuses on economic and industry development and NITA sets up a strategy to determine the future of Malaysian society. NITA’s vision is to utilise ICT to transform Malaysia into an information society and a value-based knowledge society. With the theme “Turning Ripples into Tidal Waves”, NITA focuses on the development of people, information-infrastructure and applications to create “value” and to provide equity and access for all Malaysians. In the emerging global information society, the building of knowledge societies is crucial as a source of development, especially for less developed countries like Malaysia. According to UNESCO (2005), knowledge societies are about capabilities to identify, produce, process, transform, disseminate and use information to build and apply knowledge for human development. These capabilities will require an empowering social vision that encompasses plurality, inclusion, solidarity and participation.

Since its formation, Malaysia’s ICT policy seems to have been successful in promoting information technology (IT) culture to society. For instance, there has been a

dramatic increase in the number of Malaysian citizens who are using the Internet. According to Internet World Stats (2006), Internet users in Malaysia increased from only 3.7 million in the year 2000 to 11.016 million by September 2006. The existence of several groups of electronic communities (e-communities) in the country provides good evidence that this new communication technology has begun to influence the Malaysian people to use computer-mediated communication (CMC) as a new way of interaction.

Concerning ICT policy, along with the increasing numbers of on-line communities, the issue of social integration between different ethnic groups in Malaysia can be worked from a rather new perspective. Therefore, it is important to explore whether on-line networks, through the formation of on-line communities, affect (enhance, reinforce or modify) the forms of social integration among heterogeneous society. This research will take the opportunity to focus on this issue through an analysis of social capital patterns and inter-ethnic integration in selected on-line communities in Malaysia.

1.4 The Research Questions

The issue of inter-ethnic relations is of significant concern in Malaysia because it is often regarded as a threat to national unity and the welfare of the people. For a long time, the Government has been making great efforts to overcome this problem. However, tension and division remain a major concern; in fact, there is evidence that the problems are worsening. Government efforts and encouragement for the formation of on-line communities in the country may have the potential to transform Malaysia into an information and knowledge-based society. However, whether this will help to increase the level of social integration between inter-ethnic communities remains to be seen, and will be the main question of this research. To explore this issue, this research will be guided by the following questions:

- 1) What is the rationale for the formulation of the Malaysia ICT policy and the promotion of on-line communities?

- 2) In what ways do on-line communities work in the context of a multi-ethnic society?
- 3) Do on-line networks create social capital among these diverse on-line community members?
- 4) What are the patterns of on-line networks and social capital and, do they contribute to shaping the future of on-line communities within the context of social integration and national unity in Malaysia?

1.5 Chapter Overview

The thesis is divided into nine chapters. Chapter 2 describes Malaysia's ICT policy and its development agenda with respect to the similar experience of other countries in the East Asian region. Discussion begins with exploration of the concept of information and knowledge societies, which will be the basis for this research. Following this, a focus is placed on the role of the Malaysian Government in initiating IT programs and then implementations. These include detailed descriptions of two major ICT initiatives: the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) and the National Information Technology Agenda (NITA). Both initiatives are examined in relation to general socio-economic development and political agendas. Under NITA, emphasis is given to the initiatives and encouragement which influenced the formation and establishment of on-line communities in Malaysia.

Chapter 3 provides an in-depth discussion on the concept of "governmentality" and "power/knowledge", introduced by Michael Foucault. The purpose of this discussion is to understand both the processes and consequences of implementation and adoption of ICTs within the context of Government-Society relationships. As a developing country, Malaysia faces challenges in resolving socio-cultural and technological gaps across its society. The implementation and encouragement of many ICT projects, which leads to the formation of on-line communities, may bring a huge change in the life of society. Accordingly, the impact of ICTs on communities, based on evidence that materializes in Malaysia and other countries' experience, is emphasized in this discussion.

Chapter 4 provides additional theoretical foundation for the research. Three theoretical perspectives: the “Networks Society” theory, the concept of “Social Capital” and “Social Integration,” all of which are used to guide the empirical and analytical aspects of the research. The Network Society theory is used to explore the dynamics of ICTs and the development of on-line communities in Malaysia. Social capital and its role in on-line networks helps to form an understanding of the way on-line communities can increase communication and interaction across members towards their mutual benefits. Social integration theory informs debate surrounding the pre and post introduction of ICTs across Malaysian plural society.

The documentation of theoretical constructs leads to a chapter of methodology. This chapter consists of three major discussion areas: research approach and strategy, data collection and analysis techniques. The first part describes the research methodology that is used: a case study that utilized a mixed methods design. The second and third parts involve collection of data in five important steps: (1) sample and sampling process, (2) question’s design, (3) piloting and testing, (4) data collection and recruitment and, (5) analysis of data. All the stages involved were based on the revised “Analytical Generation” structure developed originally by Robert Yin.

Chapters 6 and 7 discuss the results of data analysis from two groups of research participants: on-line communities’ administrators and on-line communities’ members. Chapter 6 focuses on a qualitative analysis based on interview data gathered from eight on-line administrators of on-line communities. The analysis is divided into two parts: the first discusses the background of the six on-line communities selected as case studies and the second discusses the outcomes of the analysis based on six themes drawn from the analysis.

Chapter 7 discusses an analysis and findings based on 162 web-based quantitative data collected from a survey of on-line communities’ members. The purpose of the analysis is to gather information about members including their demographic structure, networking history and on-line activities. The analysis will focus on social capital formation and interaction experiences of members with other ethnic groups in both on-line and off-line circumstances. Unlike the data used in Chapter 6, which was solely based on a qualitative approach, this chapter combines a mix of quantitative and qualitative analysis to provide in-depth information on members’ views and

experiences. Data analysis and discussion are based upon the themes developed in the previous chapter which examined administrators' views. These are: class and language use, culture and religious observation and, gender issues.

Chapter 8 gathers the findings from the two analyses performed in Chapters 6 and 7 to address the concept of social capital. The aim of this chapter is to focus on the issues of trust and reciprocity which are seen as part of a set of cultural and religious practices, languages and understanding of national identity amongst Malaysian society. Discussion will be supported by analysis from interviews with 27 public informants and two Government representatives. This is to provide a wider feature of national/information on the issues discussed.

Chapter 9 concludes the research. Discussion in this chapter focuses on the knowledge and experience gathered from the case studies and explores the main research issue of on-line communities and their impact on social capital and social integration. Here, the discussion highlights two perspectives: first, to what extent on-line networks help shape community practices and national unity in Malaysia; second, the limitation of the study and future prospects. Suggested recommendations are provided to future researchers who are interested in further undertaking a similar study.

Chapter 2

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) POLICY IN MALAYSIA: AN OVERVIEW

2.0 Introduction

By the late 1990s, information and communication technology (ICT) was well established and had gone through constant growth in developed nations such as the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), European countries and Japan. Indeed, ICT has become a major player in development arenas since the experience of wealthy countries has demonstrated that access to information technologies can be a road to a better life, constitute economic prosperity and be a way to increase the competitiveness of the people. Therefore, this has become a metaphor in the “modernist worldview” and “development approach” (Hansson, 2002; p.286) with ICT strategies now incorporated into the programmes of most aid agencies and non-government organizations (NGOs).

Not wishing to appear backwards-looking, many Governments all over the world have started to incorporate ICTs into plans to accelerate local economies as well as social development. Third World countries, in particular, have felt the need to pursue ICTs in order to transform from industrial to information economies in order to remain

competitive, especially to enable the market-oriented demands of globalization. Malaysia is amongst the countries that recognized the huge potential of this new initiative. It is believed that ICTs will propel the country into the league of developed nations by the year 2020. Guided by a National Vision *Wawasan 2020* (Vision 2020), the Government formulated its first ICT policy in 1996 to carry out this target. With a well-planned framework and huge investment, it was hoped that the use and adoption of ICTs by society will help the nation to initiate a robust economic growth and further transform all Malaysians into a brand new society – an “information” and “value-based” knowledge society. This chapter attempts a mapping-out of ICTs’ distribution and the development of such a policy in selected developing countries, with special attention paid to the growth and development of ICTs in Malaysia. One of the purposes of this is to show the role of the Malaysian Government as an actor responding to the policy, with special reference to programs and initiatives that have been put in place. The chapter will ask to what extent the ICT policy has influenced the emergence of on-line communities in Malaysia.

2.1 The Age of the Information Society

Beginning in the early 1960s, the concept of an information society became significant across national borders parallel with the development and the spread of ICTs. Since then, the terms “information” and “communication” become synonymous with great ideas that capture the transformation of industrial to virtual or digital society (Ungar, 2003). At the same time, the notion of an “information society” is used to describe anything that is related to a wide diffusion of ICTs, from socio-economic systems to high employment in information-related occupations (Katz, 1988). It has become a master symbol in the present day and has produced various debates on how it functions and affects society.

The concept of an information society was first introduced to the public by the former US Vice-President Al Gore in the early 1990s (Webster & Blom, 2004). However, many commentators (such as Lyon, 1988; Webster, 2002 and Dutton, 2004) have suggested that the idea is not particularly new and was mentioned earlier by Daniell Bell (1973) in his “post-industrial theory”. Bell’s central idea lies in the rise of a

new (post-industrial) society which began in two industrialized nations – the Soviet Union and the United States.¹ Generally, the theory is trying to elucidate the end of the industrial capitalist era and the arrival of a “service” or “leisure” society. Bell writes:

“...the first and simplest characteristic of a post-industrial society is that the majority of the labour force is no longer engaged in agriculture or manufacturing but in services, which are defined, residually, as trade, finance, transport, health, recreation, research, education, and government.”

(Bell, 1973; p.15)

In his later work, Bell highlights the importance of information as a defining resource of the new post-industrial phase, as raw materials acted for agricultural societies and energy for industrial societies (Forrester, 1980). Bell (1980) argues that an information society is developing in the context of post-industrialism where the computer plays a pivotal role. He forecasts the growth of social frameworks based on telecommunications that will determine changes in the economic and social environments, including the character of work and occupations. For example, Bell outlined how IT will eventually shorten labour time and diminish the numbers of production workers.² With an emphasis on how this will also change the way knowledge is created and retrieved, knowledge and information will be treated as commodities and will someday take the place of labour and other sources of capital. Knowledge, according to Bell, is a new source in defining postmodern society.

“My basic premise has been that knowledge and information are becoming the strategic resource and transforming agent of the post-industrial society.....just as the combination of energy, resources and machine technology were the transforming agencies of industrial society.”

(Bell, 1980; pp.531-45)

Since Bell, the concept of an information society has gained great attention by scholars from various fields of expertise. Alvin Toffler (1980), for example, introduced a “third” concept, which describes an information society as the third “wave” after the industrial (second) and agricultural (first) waves. Toffler’s work is claimed to be the

¹The United States refers to a capitalist society, whilst the Soviet Union was a socialist society. Both countries were chosen because at the time, they both showed increasing numbers of service sector workers and were dominant in production and technology industries.

² Bell actually means that IT replaces labour as the source of “added value” in the national product.

clearest example of Bell's post-industrial theory (Lyon, 1988). More recently, the concept of a network society, introduced by Manuel Castells (1996, 2001) has added another important contribution to the theory of an information society. His trilogy, produced in the late 1990s, has been influential in shaping the way we think about the "information age" (Castell, 1996; Webster, 2002). Castells (2001) explains an information society by introducing the term "information age" and announced "a new network society" which has been brought about by the development of networks (enabled by ICTs) and which gives priority to information flows. Castells (1996, 2001) argues that we are now undergoing a transformation towards an "information age", the main characteristics of which are the spread of networks linking people, institutions and countries. Castells puts great importance on the network and argues that real power is to be found within networks. The network society, according to Castells, goes further than the information society that is often proclaimed.

"...as new information technologies allow the formation of new forms of social organization and social interaction along electronically based information networks."

(Castells, 2000; p.693)

Bell and Castell's ideas attract attention and criticism particularly from those who see the concept of an information society as no more than rhetoric. The theories have mainly been voiced by many critical scholars (such as Lyon, 1988; Kumar, 1995 and Dutton, 2004), including Frank Webster particularly in his recent work, "The Information Society Reader" (2002). For Webster (2002), the concept of an information society is "still flawed, especially to the degree to which it describes the emergence of a new type of society" (p.264). He personally rejects the validity of the concept, although not the entire idea. Perhaps, in Webster's thinking, an information society (as described by Bell) looks like as an ideal type model of what such a society may be like, rather than how actual societies are structured. He further distinguishes the definitions of an information society along five different dimensions, namely: "technological, economic, occupational, spatial and cultural" (Webster, 2002; pp.8-9).

The above arguments confirm the idea that the concept of information technology is not entirely new. For more than three decades people have been discussing major transformations in social and economic structures that are possible through harnessing

electronic information processing technologies. Indeed, technologies have been recognized as vitally important components of new information societies. Despite the claim that post-industrial and information society theories overlap one another (Kumar, 1995) no one denies that “informatization is of major significance for advanced (and other) societies” (Webster and Blom, 2004; p.2). Yet, the varied conception of this term will lead us to dispute its validity (Webster and Blom, 2004).

2.2 From Information to a Knowledge Society

More recently, the term “knowledge society” has been used to shift the emphasis from technologies (ICT in particular) as a “driver” of change. However, the concept of a knowledge society is often confusing and intersects with the concept of an information society (Hansson, 2002). In computer science, for example, “knowledge” and “information” are often treated as synonyms (Hansson, 2002; p.40). Perhaps, as a consequence of this, the distinction between a knowledge society and an information society has not been sufficiently observed. This continually leads to the terms being misused, resulting in a misunderstanding of the differences between the two.

By definition, the term knowledge society is varied and based on different perspectives and applications. One claim is that the idea of a knowledge society is seldom defined or explored in a systematic way (Ungar, 2003). UNESCO, for example, sees a knowledge society as a society that is “capable to identify, produce, process, transform, disseminate and use information to build and apply knowledge for human development” (UNESCO, 2005; p.27). A knowledge society here is seen as perennial goal; create sources of open access to information and further sharing knowledge for positive outcomes for all. Therefore, in its many development programs and activities, UNESCO promotes the concept of a knowledge society, rather than a global information society. It is argued that information flow alone is not sufficient to grasp the opportunities for development that are offered by knowledge (Dutton, 2004).

Evers (2001), on the other hand, suggests that a knowledge society is not about the hardware (which is central in an information society) but the software. He argues

that “in a knowledge society, systems are not technology driven but determined by contents, meaning and knowledge” (p.13). This is similar to what Ungar (2003) claims of information as “bundle of facts” (p.337) while knowledge “entails more coherent interpretive packages that contextualize, organize and integrate mere facts” (p.37). Agrawal (2002) supports this, arguing that “information has no value until it becomes integrated knowledge” (p.6).

All these definitions provide useful distinctions between the concepts of information and knowledge societies. Therefore, it is argued that a knowledge society could be seen as an entity which combines the role of technology with human intelligence. Albeit with information and knowledge as the main resources, human capital may act as another important element in a knowledge society. According to Bontis (1998), human capital can best be described as the accumulation of investments in education, training and health that raises the productive capacity of people. For instance, once companies battled for years to attract and keep their best people, but now countries are engaging in the same fight. Saudi Arabia, the country that sits on 25% of the planet’s oil, for example, knows that the “black gold” itself is not the country’s absolute future. King Abdullah, the country’s ruler, has spent USD12.5 billion to find and keep the best scientists in order to ensure the sustainability of the country’s productivity and wealth (Stewart, 1997).

Wiig (1997) suggests that investment in human capital may contribute significantly to productivity growth and is crucial in today’s knowledge society. Bontis (1998) echoes this view stating that the most valuable asset of a knowledge society is its intellectual capital. They suggest that for societies to be able to become knowledge societies, they must invest in their people. A knowledge society needs people who can not only use new technology, but create it as well. Technology itself is not enough to bring about the development and success of such societies. ICTs for example, can only be considered as potential tools when combined with the information embedded in ICT systems and with the creative potential and knowledge embodied in people (Mansell & Wehn, 1998). Of relevance here is the concern expressed by Freeman and Soete (1997) about the future of developing countries. According to these scholars, if developing countries do not invest more in education and specifically in research and development (R&D), they will be excluded from the triadic knowledge and innovation networks,

which are mainly concentrated in more developed regions. Studies have also found that “societies that tend to be less equal in terms of access to education and learning outcomes tend to be less equal in terms of income distribution” (OECD, 2000; p.18). Therefore, it is believed that the sustainability of knowledge societies is not determined merely by information flows and ICT infrastructures, but also by the valuable capital embedded within people who are able to control technology and at the same time have the power to produce and control knowledge.

2.3 Knowledge Society or Knowledge Economy?

The significance of human capital for the creation of a knowledge society is seen in the extent to which knowledge has taken over the role of capital and labour in the economy (Bajwa, 2001). When this occurs, a “knowledge economy” – the term was first coined by Peter F. Drucker, a prominent American economist in his 1959 publication, “Landmarks of Tomorrow” – is formed (Drucker, 1994; p.62). Unlike Bell, Drucker (1993, 1994) sees the transformation of Western civilizations mostly in economic terms. He applies the notion of a “post-capitalist society” rather than a post-industrial society and establishes the significance of a knowledge economy in defining a knowledge society. Drucker (1994; p.18) writes:

“Knowledge is now fast becoming the one factor of production, sidelining both capital and labour. It may be premature (and certainly would be presumptuous) to call ours a knowledge society – so far we only have a knowledge economy. But our society is surely ‘post-capitalist’.”

Drucker (1993) believes that the free market is still valuable as an economic integrative mechanism in a post-capitalist society.³ But the central issue is the use of knowledge as “the factor of production” (p.7). Drucker (1993) argues that knowledge in a post-capitalist society can fundamentally change the structure of society by creating new social and political dynamics. This is due to the emergence of what he calls

³ A free market is a main mechanism in a capitalist society which is dominated by two social classes: “the capitalist, who owned and controlled the means of production” (Drucker, 1993; p.4) and the workers who Karl Marx claims as the group of proletarians, alienated, exploited and dependent.

“knowledge workers” (1993; p.7). Drucker (1993; p.7) claims that knowledge workers are already a leading social group in post-capitalist society and defines them as:

“...knowledge executives who know how to allocate knowledge to productive use – just as the capitalists knew how to allocate knowledge to productive use; knowledge professionals, knowledge employees. Practically, all these knowledge people will be employed in organizations. Yet unlike the employees under capitalism, they own both the ‘means of production’ and the ‘tools of production’.”

Further, in *The Age of Social Transformation* (1994), Drucker clearly notes the importance of learning and education as other central elements for a knowledge society. He suggests that much skill and knowledge can now be acquired by means of new learning technologies and society will inevitably become far more competitive.⁴

Since Drucker, no standard definitions have been produced but many are trying to describe the knowledge economy based on their understandings and use. For example:

i) The UK Department of Trade and Industry

“[A] knowledge economy is a knowledge-driven economy in which the generation and exploitation of knowledge play the predominant role in the creation of wealth.”

(Economic Research Services Department, 2000; p.10).

ii) The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD)

“..economy that is directly based on the production, distribution, and use of knowledge and information.”

(OECD, 2000; p.32).

iii) Malaysia’s Prime Minister’s Office

“The knowledge-based economy is one where the generation and utilization of knowledge contribute to a significant part in economic growth and wealth creation.”

(Malaysia’s Prime Minister’s Office Report, 2005; p.119).

⁴ Drucker (1993) expresses his concern for the other group of workers – service workers – the group that have been claimed as second class in post-capitalist society. He defines this group as one that “lack[s] the necessary education to be knowledge workers” (p.7) and suggest that they will be left far behind in post-capitalist society.

2.4 ICT in Asia – A Brief Overview of Policy Formulated in Selected Developing Regions

Information and knowledge are now considered to be primary sources of competitiveness. Many Governments see both elements as central to economic growth and social transformation. Industrial countries, especially the OECD group, have long recognized this new revolution in their local and global economic and development agendas. These countries promote ICTs to ensure that the new technology is well spread across the population. The US Government, for example, initiates various policies to alleviate the digital divide and to promote broader engagement with ICT. One of them is “The Technology Opportunity Program” (TOP) – which is the largest Government program to provide grants for projects in developing digital network technologies in the public and non-profit sectors⁵ (Kvasny 2007; p.161). Similarly, the Canadian Federal Government has promoted Internet adoption, called “Connecting Canada”, which sought to make Canada “the most connected nation in the world”. More recently, they launched the “National Broadband Task Force” with the aim of making broadband services available to all communities (Viseu, et al., 2006; p.635). Meanwhile in Japan, the Government had an elaborate framework to promote regional cooperation in IT (ESCAP, 2001). As a developed nation, Japan has developed a strategic vision of creating a “knowledge-emergent society” to a stage where everyone can actively utilize information technology (IT) and fully enjoy its benefits. Japan’s IT strategy is aimed at establishing ICT in its private sector based on market forces with the hope that Japan’s economy can fully absorb the potential of ICTs and make Japan “the world’s most advanced IT nation” (ESCAP, 2001; p.28).

Modelled after these countries, many less developed nations consider a holistic paradigm change in preparation for entering the age of information technology. International aid organizations such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) regards ICT as a tool for developing countries to progress and leapfrog⁶ into the developed world (Bajwa, 2001). This influences many other world agencies to

⁵ To date, TOP has awarded 610 grants, in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, and the US Virgin Islands, totalling US\$233.5 million and leveraging US\$313.7 million in local matching funds (Kvasny, 2007; p.161).

⁶ According to UNESCO, the “leapfrogging effect” is a phenomenon whereby a country is able to bypass the wide adoption of an earlier and less advanced technology by using a more recent one (UNESCO, 2005; p.18).

become active in promoting the application of ICTs by providing help through their advisory services and expertise. The United Nations (UN), for instance, teamed-up with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU)⁷ in providing access to infrastructure and information and communication services. They aim to integrate the telecommunication networks of countries all around the world for national development (United Nations, 2006).

By the late twentieth century, there had been continual progress in the development of ICTs throughout the industrialized world (Steinmuller, 2001). Meanwhile, there are also growing numbers of developing countries that show interest, with some steadily preparing national strategies to effectively participate in this new revolution. India, perhaps earlier than any other developing country, has taken a long leap in its communication, information technology and telecom services sectors (Agrawal, 2002). In 1984, the Congress Government under Rajiv Gandhi recognized ICTs as the right path towards technology-induced development and assumed “informatization” as an effective route to reshape Indian society (Bajwa, 2001). On the level of strategic IT development plans, India has placed great emphasis on its burgeoning software development industry (ESCAP, 2001). Similarly, the Republic of Korea has also embarked on a national effort to overcome what they call “deep digital divides” (ESCAP, 2001; p.27). The blueprint for this campaign is the *Cyber Korea 21 Plan* that advocates all Koreans regardless of age, sex, region and income should have the opportunity to use computers and the Internet.

The revolution in ICTs has also brought this new technology to Southeast Asia, known as the ASEAN countries⁸. The promises of ICTs for economic growth and the promotion of social development has fascinated these countries and encouraged them to embrace ICTs in national development strategies. The ICTs initiative in the Philippines, for instance, began in 1997 when the Government formulated an ambitious plan to build its first national IT infrastructure. Dubbed as the IT Agenda for the 21st Century, it presents a strategy to make the country “Asia’s Knowledge Centre” through information technology. The aim of this plan is to provide ICTs access to “every

⁷ The ITU has been a specialised agency of the United Nations since 1949 (United Nations, 2006).

⁸ ASEAN countries include Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

business, every agency of government, every school and every home” (ESCAP, 2001; p.2).

Unlike other countries that have focused on their economic sectors, Thailand’s ICT policy puts forward a vision for the country to combat issues of social inequality. Later than the Philippines, Thailand launched its National IT Policy called “IT2000” in February 2000 (Thuvasethakul & Koanantakool, 2002; p.1). With the title “Towards Social Equity and Prosperity: Thailand IT Policy into the 21st Century”, the plan emphasizes the importance of addressing a wide range of social issues through the use of ICTs. It focuses on human development, such as improving quality of life and to reducing social inequalities to a minimum (Thuvasethakul & Koanantakool, 2002) rather than focusing solely on the information and technology industry (OECD, 2000).

Indonesia, although one of the lowest ranked South East Asian countries in terms of human development and per capita income (only above Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos) (Moedjiono, 2006), has not neglected to take part in ICTs development. Ironically, the formulation of ICT policy in Indonesia is more influenced by its unstable political situation. Since 1998, the government has implemented its national ICT development plans but ended with uncertainty since every new administration creates a new plan, replacing a previous one even before its implementation. Beginning with the National Information System (NIS) and *Nusantara 21* in 1998, under President Suharto, it then changed to the National Information Technology Framework (NITF) in 2001 right after B.J. Habibie became president. In the same year (2001), the policy was changed again to SISFONAS (National Information System) when the president was replaced by Mrs. Megawati Sukarno Putri. To date, under the government of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (20 October 2004 until present) Indonesia has moved forwards with a new ICTs strategy. With a vision “to establish a global competitive Indonesian knowledge-based society based on national values and culture” (Moedjiono, 2006), the country hopes to reach a knowledge-based society by the year 2025.

By referring to a number of examples, it has been shown that the Asian countries have set out ICT policies based on different visions and goals in order to reflect their countries’ capabilities and situations. In part, this shows that they have different strategies to develop knowledge-based societies/economies as well as varying governmental traditions and styles. This is also true of Malaysia, which has its own

national ICTs strategy. With the ambition to leapfrog from an industrial into an information age and to a knowledge-based society, the Government has carried out numerous affirmative acts since the early 1990s.

Table 2.1: Summary of National IT Strategies in Asia

Country	Year	Focus	Strategies
India	1984	Software development industry	IT Action Plan – IT for all by 2008
The Republic of Korea	1996	<i>Cyber Korea 21 Plan</i>	e-Korea Vision 2006
Japan	1994	Reforms toward the intellectual creative society of the 21 st century	Vision “e-Japan” Strategy II
Philippines	1997	Asia’s knowledge centre	IT agenda for the 21 st century
Thailand	2000	Human and social development	IT2010: Thailand IT Policy into the 21 st century
Indonesia	1998	<i>Nusantara 21</i>	ICT Policy Framework, 5 Year Action Plans

2.5 Vision 2020 and ICT Policy in Malaysia

“There was a time when land was the most fundamental basis of prosperity and wealth. Then came the second wave, the age of industrialization. Smokestacks rose where the fields were once cultivated. Now increasingly, knowledge will not be the basis of power but also prosperity. Again we must keep up. Already Malaysians are among the biggest users of computers in the region. Computer literacy is a must if we want to progress and develop. No effort must be spared in the creation of an information-rich Malaysian society.”

(Mohamad, 1998; p.10)

The development of ICTs in Malaysia began in 1991 when Malaysia’s (former) Prime Minister Tun Mahathir Mohamad, together with other national policy makers, initiated the *Wawasan 2020* or the “Vision 2020”. Vision 2020 is a national agenda that sets out specific goals and objectives for long term development calling for the country to grow into a fully developed, mature and knowledge-rich society by the year 2020. Generally, the vision focuses on two major developments: society and the economy. For

society, it is hoped that by the year 2020 all Malaysians will have strong moral and ethical values, be self-regulating and self-managing and empowered through information and knowledge, based on the concept of dignity of human-kind. Whilst for the economy, Malaysia dreams of a robust and resilient, competitive and dynamic economy with fair and equitable distribution of wealth (Shariffadeen, 2004).

For both objectives, the vision has set out nine prime challenges that should be overcome by all Malaysians before 2020 is reached. Seven out of nine challenges point out the importance of social development and national unity. For example, the first challenge emphasises establishing a united Malaysian nation (*Bangsa Malaysia*) with regards to ethnic integration with political loyalty and dedication to the nation. The second and the third challenges stress liberation and a mature democratic society. The fourth and the fifth challenges emphasised the establishment of a moral, ethical, liberal and tolerant society in the context of “belonging to one nation”. The sixth challenge focuses on a scientific and progressive society, while the seventh challenge stresses the development of a caring society in terms of welfare and resilient family systems. The final two challenges point to the need for more equal wealth distribution to establish a prosperous society with a dynamic and robust economic system.

From this vision statement and the challenges outlined, it is clear that Malaysia’s development vision does not focus merely on economics, but has in addition a social agenda. In an environment characterized by rapid advance in computer technologies, globalization and liberalization, the Malaysian Government believes that the vision will be successfully achieved through the development of the ICTs sectors and the use of new technology by all Malaysians. With a plan to move into a knowledge-based society, the Government has put great effort into leverage of ICTs in the country’s national strategy.

2.5.1 The National Information Technology Council (NITC)

ICTs development in Malaysia began when the Government set up the National Information Technology Council (NITC) in 1994 (MSC, 2007a). The NITC is an advisory group chaired by the Prime Minister with the Ministry of Science, Technology

and Innovation (MOSTI) as the secretariat (MOSTI, 2007). The NITC acts as a “think-tank” at the highest level and is responsible for any matters regarding ICTs development in Malaysia (National Report on the ICT Sector in Malaysia, no date; p.10). It also acts as the advisor and provides directions in the planning and management of ICTs for various socio-economic sectors. The other important roles of NITC includes: creating social awareness and appreciation for ICTs; promoting ICTs development and diffusion; and monitoring and evaluating Malaysia’s transformation into a knowledge society (NITC, 2007). The NITC is responsible for the formulation of Malaysia’s National ICT Policy with the introduction of two major initiatives: the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), which targets economic development and the National Information Technology Agenda (NITA) with the goal of social development.

2.5.2 The Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC)

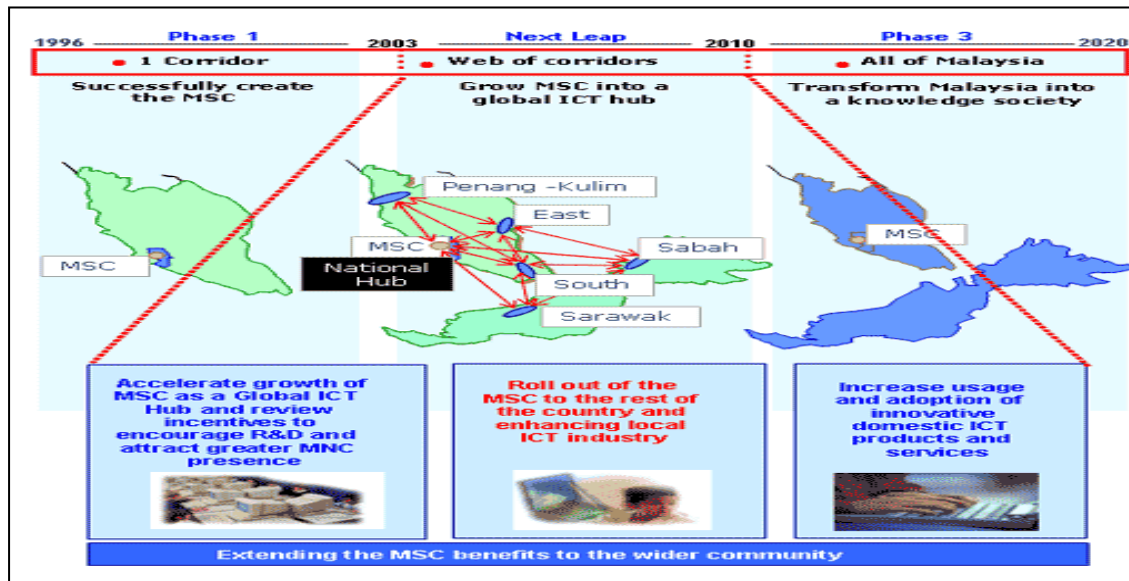
The MSC is the first and biggest initiative by the NITC. The idea of a MSC emerged in 1995 when the Government called for a move towards a knowledge-based economy as part of achieving the Vision 2020. It was officially launched on August 1, 1996 and “is designed to enhance and develop a world-class multimedia industry” (National Report on the ICT sector in Malaysia, no date; p.5). The MSC is a multi-billion dollar project comprising an area of more than 750km² (MSC, 2007a). Geographically, the MSC is a land area measuring 15x50 km² zone, stretching from the Petronas Twin Towers (the world’s tallest tower) in the centre of capital city Kuala Lumpur to the newly built Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) in the southern region in Sepang (MSC, 2007).

Claimed as a “world first”⁹ (Mohamad, 1999), the MSC comprises several administrative, industrial and technological development clusters. Among the clusters are two new cities: *Putrajaya* and *Cyberjaya*. *Putrajaya* was founded in October 1995 and acts as a new electronic Government administrative centre. *Cyberjaya* is a newly planned township launched in May 1997, located in the West of *Putrajaya*. Both are

⁹ As noted by Mahathir Mohamad (1999): “I hope you will all leave here with a full understanding of what we truly believe is a world-first – the careful creation of a region with an environment especially crafted to meet the needs of leading edge companies seeking to reap the rewards of the Information Age in Asia.”

“intelligence cities” (term coined by former Prime Minister Tun Mahathir Mohamad in 1999) and places “smart buildings” – buildings with the latest information infrastructures for living and for the business needs of knowledge workers (Mohamad, 1999). It is also a location for higher learning institutions and research centres such as the University Putra Malaysia (UPM) and the Malaysia Multimedia University (MMU). These cities aspire to be known as “The Silicon Valley of Malaysia” and the MSC has its own Technology Park located in the centre of the development area providing engineering and information technology (IT) facilities to entrepreneurs, investors and industries. Previous industrial development projects such as the free trade zone in Petaling Jaya, manufacturing hubs in the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur and the city’s financial centre also fall within the MSC (MSC, 2007b).

The MSC mega project implementation is divided into three phases beginning from the year 1996 to 2020. Phase 1 (1996–2003) (which has already concluded) involved the planning and commencing of the MSC. Phase 2 (2003–2010) has seen the establishment of a “web of corridors” – a link between the MSC and other global ICT hubs such as California’s Silicon Valley. The implementation of a global framework for cyber laws will also begin in this phase. It is also hoped that by the year 2010 at least five intelligent cities (which are similar to *Putrajaya* and *Cyberjaya*) will be built in Malaysia and be linked to other global cities worldwide. In phase 3 (2010–2020) Malaysia is expected to become a fully linked Multimedia Super Corridor. This phase will witness the establishment of an International Cybercourt of Justice and it is expected that 12 intelligent cities will be connected to the global information highway (MSC, 2007a) (see Figure 2.1). The underlying basis for this phase is to lead the development of Malaysia into high-value economy by continuing the uptake of ICT. This means that, the ultimate goal is to create a high-income advanced economy that provides quality of life and opportunities for all Malaysians. In business sector, MSC serves to complement and assist the private sector in delivering the effective modern communications infrastructure in a way to establish Malaysia as a vibrant hub for creation of ICT solutions come a leading to net exporter status. For society it is to ensure that people have the capabilities and skills to flourish in the digital economy and that all can participate in digital society. Lastly, there is a hope that the Government can continue to modernise and improve services to the taxpayer through digital procurement and the digital delivery of public services.



(Source: MSC, 2007a)

Figure 2.1: The MSC Malaysia

Being planned as a serious Government initiative, the MSC has been created with several functions and purposes. Within the three phases of development it is hoped that the MSC will be (MSC, 2007b):

- a vehicle for attracting world-class technology-led companies to Malaysia and developing local industries;
- a “Multimedia Utopia” offering a productive, intelligent environment within a multimedia value chain of goods and services which will be produced and delivered across the globe;
- an island of excellence with multimedia-specific capabilities, technologies, infrastructure, legislation policies and systems for competitive advantage;
- a test bed for invention, research and other ground-breaking multimedia developments spearheaded by seven multimedia applications, and
- a global community living on the leading-edge of the Information Society and world of Smart Homes, Smart Cities, Smart Schools, Smart Cards and Smart Partnership.

To achieve these goals, the MSC provides several initiatives, known as the Multimedia Flagship Applications. There were 7 projects launched under the flagships which have been developed to accelerate the growth of the MSC. They are: “Electronic

Government (E-government); Multipurpose Cards (MyKad); Smart Schools; Tele-health; Research & Development (R&D) Clusters; E-business and Technopreneur Development” (MSC, 2007a). The latest initiative known as a Creative Multimedia cluster was also launched in 1996. This cluster aims to develop Malaysia’s creative content industry such as a graphic design, multimedia and animation to further engage the participation (of local industries) with global producers. All these MSC Malaysia’s Flagship Applications were introduced not only for the interest of certain company but the current application helps businesses bridge the digital gap between them and a fast moving e-commerce economy.

The progress of the MSC project, which expects to take about 20 years to complete, will be monitored by the Multimedia Development Corporation (MDeC). Established in 1996, MDeC¹⁰ acts as the creator and premier support service provider of the MSC. Formally MDeC, which functions as a lead management board, was assigned by the Malaysian Government to systematically oversee the implementation and the development of the mega project. Serving as a “one-stop-centre” for new multi-national or local companies applying for MSC status, it provides various support areas such as training and development of the workforce, legal advice, grants and funding as well as managing issues relating to licenses and approval for a range of business activities (MDeC, 1996/2006). As a Government-backed corporation, MDeC facilitates the collaboration between local and international companies, sets up incubation centres and infrastructure that provides venture capital and public listings for smaller companies. The other important role of MDeC is to implement the “Bill of Guarantees” of the MSC. The Bill of Guarantees is a Government guarantee for the development of the MSC and the needs of participating MSC companies. MDeC also shoulders responsibility for developing and updating Malaysian Cyber Laws and policy formulation for the entire MSC set up (MDeC, 1996/2006; MSC, 2007a).

¹⁰ MDeC was formally a Government owned corporation. It has since been incorporated under the Companies Act.

2.5.3 The Progress of the MSC

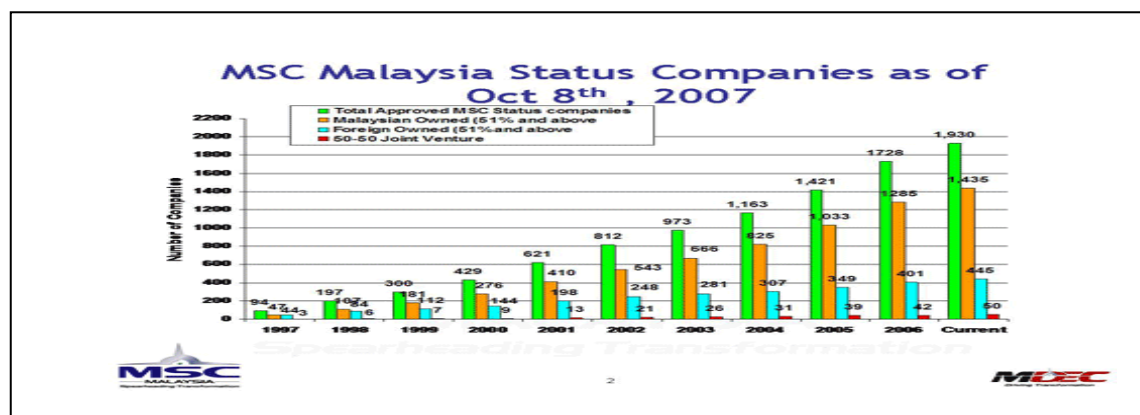
After more than 10 years of operation, the performance of MSC can be measured by evaluating the MSC status companies. This includes the amount of sales recorded, a total amount of capital and operational investment, the number of jobs created, as well as the ability of the companies to penetrate overseas markets. According to the latest MSC progress update of 8th October 2007 (MSC, 2007b), there were about 1,930 companies that have been given MSC approval compared to 429 companies in 2000 and only 94 companies in 1997. This number includes 1,435 Malaysian-owned companies, which is a tremendous rate of growth since the year 2000; 445 are foreign-owned and 50 are joint venture companies.

Currently, the MSC has successfully produced about 112 MSC Multi National Companies (MNC) or also known as Malaysia Global Companies. These are companies that exhibit several characteristics such as being fortune 500/1000 companies, Forbes 500 companies and technology leaders. A few examples are BMW Asia Technology Centre Sdn. Bhd., Dell Global Business Centre Sdn. Bhd. and Shell Global Solutions (Malaysia) Sdn. Bhd. (MSC, 2007b). In terms of capital, the MSC Impact Survey 2005 (MSC, 2007c) indicates that 12% of the registered companies have a paid-up capital amounting to more than RM5 million, whilst 17% have between RM0.5 to RM1 million. MSC Malaysia, which is largely made up of small and medium sized companies, only gained a paid-up capital less than RM500000. For specific business areas, 27% are reported to be in software development, 22% in systems integration, 16% in web design and content and with the rest in the Internet and other areas. The breakdown according to industries is: 22% in finance and insurance, 19% in telecommunications, 15% in Government, 13% in manufacturing, 8% each in retail, healthcare and transportation and 7% in smart card development and application (MSC, 2007c).

In 2005, 30,934 jobs were created in the MSC compared to 27,288 in 2004 and 19,061 in 2003, of which more than 89% have been filled by knowledge workers. These workers are mainly (88%) Malaysians and the remaining (3,094) are foreigners, primarily imported from India (1,430). Many of these companies are now aggressively going abroad to compete in the international market (MSC, 2007c). Fifty-five per cent

of the companies have reported that they were able to sell their products overseas. Among these, 70% are MSC Malaysian companies. Overall, the MSC companies have so far been able to generate sales both locally and overseas in total of RM7.22 billion in 2004, of which nearly a quarter was exported.

In spite of lucrative sales, the companies have also experienced increments in their total expenditure. In 2002, 464 companies reported to have spent RM3.61 billion (an average of RM7.8 million per company). The amount increased to RM4.63 billion in 2003 (539 companies) and in 2004, 595 companies claimed that they spent a total of RM5.11 billion. Most of the money was spent on Research and Development (R&D). However, Intellectual Property (IP), which consists of patents, industrial design and trademarks, is still considered a new focus and has not been fully explored by the MSC companies. Until 2004, there were only 395 IPs that were registered by the companies (MSC, 2007c).



(Source: NITC, 2007)

Figure 2.2: MSC Malaysia Status Companies

The MSC can be considered an appropriate channel for Malaysia to transform its industrial-based economic sectors into information-based sectors. However, as mentioned by Malaysian former Prime Minister Tun Mahathir Mohamad, development of the economy itself is not adequate to transform the country into a developed nation. He notes:

“Malaysia should not be developed only in the economic sense. It must be a nation that is fully developed along all the dimensions...We

must be fully developed in terms of national unity and social-cohesion, in terms of our economy, in terms of social justice, political stability, system of government, quality of life, social and spiritual values, national pride and confidence.”

(Mohamad, 1996; p.1).

Inspired by the national Vision 2020, the NITC has formulated another initiative known as the National Information Technology Agenda or NITA to equip and support the MSC from the perspective of social and human development.

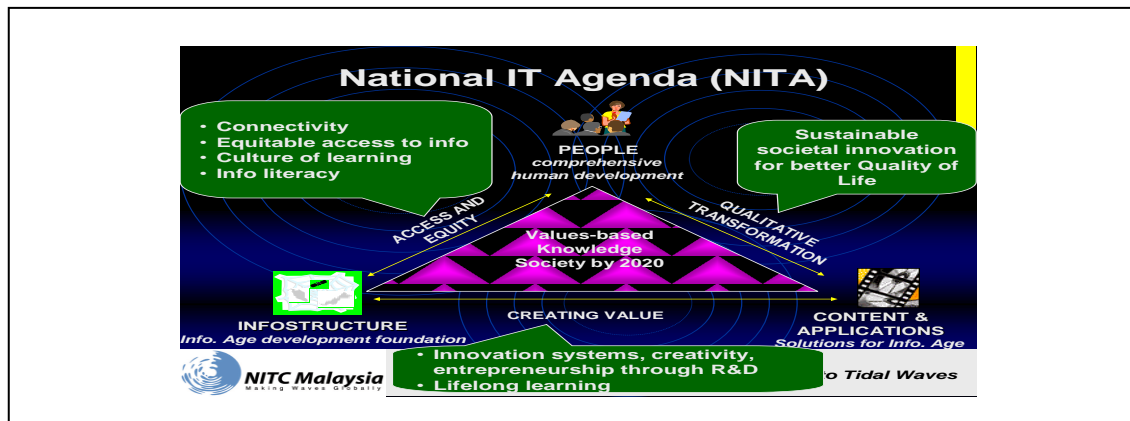
2.5.4 The National Information Technology Agenda (NITA)

The National Information Technology Agenda or NITA is a document outlining Malaysia ICTs development, formulated and launched by the NITC in December 1996 (NITC, 2007). With the theme “Turning Ripples into Tidal Waves”¹¹, NITA’s vision is to utilize ICTs to transform Malaysia into an “information society” and finally into a “value-based knowledge society” (NITC, 2007). According to Tengku Mohd. Azzman Sharifadeen, a former Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Malaysian Institute of Microelectronic System or MIMOS Berhad¹² (1994), the “value-based knowledge society” that Malaysia aims to create is a society that is united, moral and ethical. Also, the society must include equal access to information (an information society), live in the culture of life-long learning and innovation (a knowledge society) and have a sustainable quality of life.

The working model for NITA is the National IT Framework (NITF) which focuses on three elements of development: the development of human capital, information infrastructure and ICTs’ application. Forming the basis of an “informatization society”, NITA applies the concept that “with relevant skills, infrastructure and tools, people are able to use ICTs to develop a whole society” (MSC, 2007a) (see Figure 2.3).

¹¹ The “ripples” are focused initiatives by the Government to create the necessary environment and empowerment of the people so that they will bring about the tidal wave of change required to achieve the NITA vision (MAIT, 2002/05).

¹² MIMOS is the former secretariat of NITC.



(Source: NITC, 2007)

Figure 2.3: NITA's National IT Framework (NITF)

2.5.5 Demonstrator Application Grant Schemes (DAGS) and the Emergence of On-line Communities in Malaysia

One of the earliest initiatives in the NITA framework was the Demonstrator Application Grant Scheme (DAGS). The DAGS acts as a funding platform primarily for supporting electronic community (e-community) development in three major areas: 1) promoting social digital inclusion or bridging the digital divide (BDD);¹³ 2) enhancing economic competitiveness¹⁴ and; 3) supporting e-public services¹⁵. The history of DAGS begins when NITC realized that the only important factor to guaranteeing the success of NITA was by inspiring citizens to get involved in electronic communities (Ahmad, 2002). Therefore, NITC “embarked on a mission to encourage the creation of electronic clusters of communities nationwide, based on their shared values, belief, mission and vision” (Ahmad, 2002; p.76). The purpose of this action is to demonstrate the real benefit of ICTs to the various communities and individuals. In the beginning, the initiative seemed successful as many Malaysians showed interest in getting involved in the e-projects promoted. However, during the implementation, many enthusiasts were confronted with financial start-up problems. Back in the 1990s, purchasing computers and getting access to the Internet in Malaysia was very costly. With an average monthly salary of RM2,000 (USD526) and higher living costs

¹³ For example, a project bridging the digital divide between rural poor, urban poor, senior citizens, disabled people, women and youth.

¹⁴ For example, a project for developing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and electronic and electric cluster (E&E).

¹⁵ For example, a project for supporting the development of e-local authorities.

especially for those who live in urban areas, the creation of such (virtual) communities was almost impossible. Moved by these concerns, the NITC decided to develop a grant assistance plan to overcome these barriers. Designed with a unique formula, DAGS was eventually launched on 21st April 1998 (DAGS, 2006).

DAGS is administered by NITC with the main purpose to assist in the development of what they called “Demonstrator Applications” (Ahmad, 2002; Kheng Joo, 2003). With a mission to facilitate the social and economic progress of Malaysia through the utilization and innovation of ICTs, this program can also be considered a platform to build human capacity and capability through the ICT applications (DAGS, 2006). There are six main objectives of DAGS that reflect the effort to empower people (DAGS, 2006; Ahmad, 2002; Kheng Joo, 2003):

- i. To acculturate Malaysians to ICTs, enabling them to maximize the benefit from ICT applications at work and at home;
- ii. to build an integrated network of electronic communities using ICTs and multimedia technology;
- iii. to promote the dynamic growth of Malaysian web-shapers and web-adapters;
- iv. to develop entrepreneurial communities enabled by electronic networks;
- v. to enhance closer cooperation and collaboration between public agencies, private corporations, non-profit organizations and NGOs through joint ventures and institutional linkages, and
- vi. to encourage Malaysia to be more innovative in using and adapting existing ICT and multimedia technologies.

The scheme was initially granted RM50 million under the 7th Malaysia Plan (January 1997–December 2000) (DAGS, 2006). Those groups or individuals who create the on-line communities under this scheme were considered as pilot groups. As a guideline, NITC spelled out five priority areas for on-line community development: e-learning, e-community, e-economy, e-public services and e-sovereignty (Ahmad, 2002). Due to the positive response to this, the Government upgraded the scheme allocation to RM100 million under the 8th Malaysia Plan (January 2002–December 2005) (DAGS, 2006).

2.5.6 The Progress of DAGS and On-line Communities

Since DAGS was launched in 1998 the number of projects has grown rapidly.¹⁶ Based on an analysis carried out by DAGS' secretariat (DAGS, 2006), there were 56 approved Demonstrator Application (DA) projects in 2002. The distribution of the projects, according to specified priority areas, was heavily concentrated on e-communities. This was followed by e-economy, e-learning and e-public services respectively. There are no projects recorded under the e-sovereignty¹⁷ heading so far (Ahmad, 2002). Some of the DAGS projects are established and accepted worldwide. Among these are: the ASEAN Review of Biodiversity and Environment Conservation (ARBEC), which has a link with great historical museums in Europe and the United States; FamilyPlace.com, accepted by the Global Knowledge Partnership and Cybercare and eCommunity for a Children's Home, an orphan e-community adopted by the Microsoft Foundation. Others include e-Pekak, which has received an award from the United Nations for its contribution to bridging the digital gap among deaf people and Smart *Masyarakat* or *SM@SY*, the rural e-community accepted by the Worldview Foundation as a good example for Sri Lanka's development (DAGS, 2006). Currently, there are growing numbers of self-funded e-communities in Malaysia. Most of them are residential-based communities such as USJ Subang Jaya e-community that has built an e-channel for monitoring the welfare of their local neighbourhood. The others are communities of interest that are based on various subjects such as entertainment (e.g *Forum Artis Melayu* or Malay Artists Forum) and business (e.g *Lelong* or Auction).

2.5.7 Bridging Digital Divide (BDD)

The digital divide is a global problem. It exists everywhere in the world, not only in developing countries but also in industrialized nations (Abu Bakar & Crump, 2005). A growing digital divide means that people are continuing to be excluded from mainstream societies and thus struggle to secure improvements in their economic and

¹⁶ Overall, the projects are promoted by three main groups which are categorized as: community (comprising individuals, NGOs and non-public organizations), public (comprising public universities and government agencies) and private (comprising small and medium size industries, MSC companies and multinational companies).

¹⁷ E-sovereignty refers to resilient national identity.

social conditions. Considering the issue of the digital divide in Malaysia, the Government has initiated numerous programs to reduce this barrier. Amongst them are:

- i. The *Medan Infodesa* program, initiated by the Ministry of Rural Development, which provides training and hardware to rural communities.
- ii. The K3P (*Kumpulan 3P – Pendengar, Penonton, Pembaca* / 3P Groups – The listeners, the audiences and the readers) program initiated by the Ministry of Information, which has set up centres called *Pondok Harmoni* equipped with PCs and Internet access.
- iii. Setting up eService kiosks in both community and public areas.

The Government also took an early step by presenting the “Connecting All Schools” program to prevent new generations from the digital divide. Under this program, Malaysia has successfully linked 10,000 schools with ICT applications and infrastructure. The program has benefited about 5 millions students from both primary and secondary levels (NITC, 2007). Another initiative is the “Internet Desa” program promoted by the Ministry of Energy, Communication and Multimedia. The program involves supplying computers to rural communities along with a free Internet access. This program has successfully connected more than 40 tele-centres located in local post-shops throughout the country. Substantial funding from the Government enabled the acquisition of five to eight PCs per location and the establishment of Internet connectivity. Training facilities were made available to all communities and as an important innovation, these ICT community centres were managed by the local communities themselves.

2.6 Overall Performance of ICT Sectors: 1996 until the Present

Since the 1990s, the Malaysian Government has spent billions of Ringgit Malaysia (RM) to support the implementation of ICT policy. This includes upgrading the country’s telecommunication infrastructures, implementing MSC and NITA and many other initiatives related to the development of ICTs. Until the end of the fourth

quarter 2006, progress was reported in ICT sectors' performance in Malaysia¹⁸. Cellular phone¹⁹ subscribers, for instance, show the highest increments of ICT sectors. At the end of 2002, the penetration rate of cellular phones in Malaysia was about 30 per cent, making up 7 million users (MCMC, 2007). This made Malaysia the second highest country for cellular phone penetration in South East Asia (after Singapore) in that particular year. Later, cellular phones users reportedly rose from 223 per 1000 people in 2000 to 771 in 2005 (*Internet Usage Statistics and Marketing Report 2001-2006*, 2006). The statistics show that in early 2006, cellular phone penetration in Malaysia had already passed the 80 per cent mark, with subscriber numbers at the same time passing 20 million (MCMC, 2007). This was a remarkable achievement compared to only 2 million subscribers in 1998.

Table 2.2: Cellular Phones Users

Telefon selular <i>Cellular phones</i>							
Tahun	Suku	Pasca bayar	Pra bayar	Jumlah ('000)	Kadar pertumbuhan (%)	Kadar penembusan	
2006	1	2,983	17,607	20,590	5.3	77.7	
	2	3,162	18,358	21,520	4.5	80.8	
	3	3,292	18,561	21,853	1.5	81.6	
	4	3,368	16,096	19,464	-10.9	72.3	
2007	1	3,392	17,427	20,819	7.0	77.0	
	2	3,485	17,734	21,219	1.9	78.2	
Year	Qtr	Postpaid	Prepaid	Total ('000)	Growth rate (%)	Penetration rate	

(Source: MCMC, 2007)

Another ICT sector that shows tremendous change is the Internet. Internet in Malaysia began in 1986 with the establishment of the first Malaysian Internet link, *RangKoM* (*Rangkaian Komputer Malaysia*) or the “Chains of Malaysia” Computer. *RangKoM* was set up by MIMOS Berhad²⁰, the Government's own corporation with the original idea coming from Dr. Mohamed Awang Lah, an academic from the University

¹⁸ According to the World Bank, the five indicators of ICT sector performance are: access, quality, affordability, institutional efficiency and sustainability and ICT applications.

¹⁹ Currently, there are five mobile network operators available in Malaysia: Celcom, Maxis, Digi, TM Touch and TimeCel.

²⁰ Until November 1996 MIMOS was a corporation owned by the Government under the Prime Minister's Office. It was then corporatized by using a brand MIMOS Berhad as a company under the Ministry of Finance (MoF) with 3 core functions – R&D, National IT Policy Development and Business Development (MIMOS, 2006).

of Malaya (UM), Malaysia (MIMOS, 2006). At that time, *RangKoM* only provided linkages to several of Malaysia's public universities including the University Malaya (UM), Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM) (the former name of Universiti Putra Malaysia) and the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). In addition, *RangKoM* had four dial-up lines to Australia, the USA, the Netherlands and Korea.

In 1990, the Internet was further developed in Malaysia when MIMOS introduced Malaysia's first Internet Service Provider (ISP). The service, called *Jaring*, began its operations in 1992 as a research network, later expanding to the commercial sector and general public services. The installation of a satellite between Malaysia and the USA in the same year (1992) enabled *Jaring* to provide Malaysian users with accessibility to the Internet in more than 140 countries.

In 1992, there were only 30 Internet subscribers registered in Malaysia. The number increased to 947 by October 1994 and then at a rate of about 20 per cent per month. By the end of 1995, this group had grown to over 25,000 users. By this time, *Jaring* had begun to experience growth problems. Users would often have to wait a considerable amount of time before being able to make a dial-up connection. Some curtailment or closure was also reported by new users trying to get access for a period of several months from late 1995 to early 1996.

To overcome these problems, *Telekom Malaysia*²¹ launched Malaysia's second Internet provider, TMNet, in July 1996. TMNet began its operations in November 1996 to compliment *Jaring*. As of December 1997, TMNet had 51% of the subscribers' market share, while *Jaring* took 49%. Currently, *Jaring* and TMNet are still the only two Internet providers in Malaysia. Telecom Malaysia provides the lines for both operators and has become the only telecommunication company in the world that provides a concession of 66% of telephone charges for Internet users (MIMOS, 2006).

Since the development of the MSC in 1996, in 1998 Malaysia replaced and expanded its copper analogue system to a new digital fibre-optic cable network to meet the increasing demand for capacity (MSC, 2007a). T-1 (trunk digital lines) and ISDN

²¹ Telekom Malaysia is formally known as Jabatan Telekom Malaysia, a Government-owned agency. After its corporatization and privatization in 12 October 1984, it was known as Syarikat Telekom Malaysia Berhad (STMB). It officially changed its global brand again from Telekom Malaysia to TM in April 2005 (Wikipedia, 2007).

services were recently introduced. This simultaneously upgraded the infrastructure and implemented new technologies such as digital, fibre optics, broadband, wireless and cellular, ATM and ISDN (MSC, 2007a). Since then, the Internet Host (IHC) number has increased from 107,971 in 2004 to 158,650 in 2007 (MSC, 2007b). This led to increased Internet subscribers and users in Malaysia. By the first quarter of 2004, the numbers of Internet dial-up subscribers were 3,148,000, with an estimated number of users at about 9,444,000 and a total of 142,332 broadband subscriptions. In the fourth quarter of 2005 it rose to 3,672,000 and to 3,764,000 for the same quarter of 2006, with estimated numbers of users about 11,292,000 (MCMC, 2007).

Table 2.3: Dial-up Internet Subscriptions

Langganan Internet 'dial-up' <i>Internet dial-up subscriptions</i>					
Tahun	Suku	Jumlah (‘000)	Kadar pertumbuhan (%)	Kadar penembusan	Anggaran bilangan pengguna (‘000)
2006	1	3,692	0.5	13.9	11,076
	2	3,729	1.0	14.0	11,187
	3	3,751	0.6	14.0	11,253
	4	3,764	0.3	14.0	11,292
2007	1	3,791	0.7	14.0	11,373
	2	3,862	1.9	14.2	11,586
Unjuran Forecast 2007				14.5	
Year	Qtr	Total (‘000)	Growth rate (%)	Penetration rate	Estimated number of users (‘000)

(Source: MCMC, 2007)

Subscribers to broadband also rapidly increased from 502,000 subscribers in 2005 (19.4 per 1000 people) to almost 900,000 in the fourth quarter of 2006 (World Bank, 2007; MCMC, 2007). According to Malaysia’s Internet Usage and Marketing Report (Internet World Stats, 2007), the percentage of Internet users in Malaysia increased about 23.9 per cent between 2000 and 2006, rising to 11.01 million users in 2006.

Despite a tremendous growth in mobile and Internet subscribers, the penetration of telephone main lines²² has gradually decreased. Having moved rapidly from around 2 million in 1990 to 4.7 million in 2002 (penetration approaching 20% at the time), fixed-line subscriber numbers dipped to 4.6 million by the end 2003. The World Bank (2007) reported that there was a significant decline in users from 202 per 1000 in the year 2000

²² Telekom Malaysia (TM) is the only prime fixed-mainlines provider in Malaysia.

to 172 per 1000 people in 2005. By the start of 2006, the numbers were sitting at 4.3 million, a decrease of 0.3 million from the last 3 years recorded.

Table 2.4: Number of Broadband Subscriptions by Technology

Bilangan langganan jalur lebar mengikut teknologi										
Number of broadband subscriptions by technology										
Tahun	Suku	Bilangan langganan ('000)					Kadar penembusan (per 100 penduduk)	Bilangan langganan isirumah ('000)	Kadar penembusan (per 100 isirumah)	
		ADSL	SDSL	Wireless	Wireless Lan	Satelit				Jumlah
2006	1	539.9	3.9	7.3	23.3	1.7	576.1	2.2	462.0	8.0
	2	610.4	4.2	8.0	30.5	1.8	654.9	2.5	527.0	9.1
	3	670.3	4.5	8.7	74.9	1.8	760.2	2.8	582.4	10.0
	4	735.9	4.8	15.1	141.4	1.8	899.0	3.3	644.7	11.0
2007	1	784.1	5.2	21.2	181.8	1.9	994.2	3.7	689.8	11.7
	2	858.0	5.5	21.9	218.6	2.0	1,106.0	4.1	754.7	12.8
Sasaran MyICMS										
MyICMS Target										
2008										
50.0										
Year	Qtr	Number of subscriptions ('000)					Penetration rate (per 100 inhabitants)	Number of household subscriptions ('000)	Penetration rate (per 100 households)	
		ADSL	SDSL	Wireless	Wireless Lan	Satellite				Total

(Source: MCMC, 2007)

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter attempts to identify global debates about new ways of developing information and knowledge societies and, more importantly, how these are being introduced into countries in South East Asia, including Malaysia. OECD countries are investing heavily in ICTs as key supports for their economic sectors and reform in public and private sector management. Other countries – developing nations in particular – are seeking to use these new technologies to achieve efficiency gains in a variety of ways to ensure their survival in the global economy and competitive development demands. From various socio-economic perspectives, ICT can be seen as an important catalyst which helps in paradigm changes. It seems like many of the reforms would not be possible without ICTs. More importantly, ICTs are seen as a “must” in order to develop an information society and knowledge society and/or economy.

Despite the huge potential of ICTs, the promise of these new technologies in the context of adopting and integrating remains uncertain. Questions whether these new technologies will provide a magic formula for achieving development along with national integration of social values and culture remain unanswered. The next chapter will investigate this question with an in-depth discussion of Malaysia's ICT policy and the rationale that lies behind this strategy. In order to do so, discussion will be developed through an analysis of Foucault's neologism of "governmentality" and "power/knowledge" to provide insight into the way Governments try to produce citizens best-suited to fulfil their policies and potential consequences of such acts of governance.

Chapter 3

MALAYSIA'S ICT POLICY: INSIGHTS FROM FOUCAULT'S GOVERNMENTALITY AND POWER/KNOWLEDGE

3.0 Introduction

The Malaysian Government can consider the introduction of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as an appropriate strategy to ensure the country is on the right path to achieve national development goals. Yet, as a nation that embraces diversity, the use and adoption of new technologies will inform debates within the country about whether such an approach would help the Government achieve their desired goals. More importantly, it is crucial to ask whether on-line connections may lead to national cohesion and integration across all ethnic communities in the country.

All the above questions will be discussed using two concepts: “governmentality” and “power/knowledge”. These two related neologisms, originally by Michael Foucault (1991), can help us to better understand the process and consequences of the implementation and adoption of ICTs between both the Government and society. The chapter seeks to bring a new perspective on how public policy tries to implement a change in a society. More importantly, it extends debate about how the life of people

within a plural society such as Malaysia are being shaped and changed by the introduction and greater use of information and communication technology.

3.1 Governmentality

After more than 10 years of implementation, ICT policy has had both achievements and challenges that have informed national debates as to how far the introduction and use of these new technologies has influenced economic developments and politics of Malaysian society. The Government's initiative in introducing ICT policy to Malaysia can be critically examined from the perspective of "governmentality". The term has helped to give a new understanding of power relations; different from that found in traditional liberal and Marxist theories of power (Mills, 2003).

The term "governmentality" was originally created by the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1991; p.87). He first used the concept to describe a particular way of administering populations in modern European history. Later, he expanded the definition to encompass the techniques and procedures that are designed to govern the conduct of both individuals and populations at every social level, not merely from an administrative or political aspect. In Foucault's work, the concept of governmentality can be applied to three distinct types of government: "government of the self", "government of others" and "government of the state" (Dean, 1999; p.2). However, the current discussion will only be focusing on the term "Government" and "governmentality" in the manner of "government of the state," which in this case, refers to the Malaysian State-Government in particular.

Foucault (1991) asserts that the concept of governmentality can also be associated with two other denotations: "government rationality" and/or "the art of government" (p.90). Here, Foucault refers to an activity or practice of government and how it might be carried out. "The art of government" means a way or system of thinking about the nature and practice of government such as who can govern, what governing is and what or who is governed.

Foucault (cited in Gordon, 1991) describes government as “the conduct of conduct” (p.2). The phrase, catchy and interesting to think about, deals with the “problematic nature of Government” (Smart, 2002; p.xiv) that addresses the question of how our conduct and that of others is formed, directed and regulated by means of a series of practices and associated succession of different forms of rationality. Later, this definition was extended by Dean (1999; p.11) in a relatively more comprehensive and significant stance:

“Government is any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working through our desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs, for definite but shifting end with a diverse or relatively unpredictable consequences and outcomes”.

Interestingly, Dean’s definition has given a different idea of how government can be seen not simply as a means to order people, but also involving some sort of attempt to deliberate on, and to direct human conduct. In this sense, Dean argues that those who seek to govern will conceive of human conduct as “something that can be regulated, controlled, shaped and turned to specific ends”, by using a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge (Dean, 1999; p.11). In other words, Dean’s perspective suggests that the Government will do anything that they think is possible in order to achieve their vision and mission.

In brief, the term governmentality can be seen in two rather different ways (Larner & Walters, 2002). First, it can be claimed as a particular way of thinking about and exercising power over a state, “...not for territorial defence or to aggrandizement of the sovereign but optimization of the health and welfare of the population” (Larner & Walters, 2002; p.2). The second claim prompts us to consider even more complex relations between thought and Government. Governmentality in this second sense is an approach of exploration of how particular instruments, such as representation or statement, knowledge and expertise have always been involved in the process of governing with regards to what and who is to be governed.

After considering these two perspectives, it is suggested that the “governmentality” of the Malaysian Government could be best positioned in both

viewpoints. The Government's rationality in formulating ICT policy can be considered for three reasons. Firstly, it was meant to help increase the quality of life and well-being of the population. Secondly, it was to provide a more efficient administrative style and closeness of relationship between the Government and society, for instance, through the creation of e-government. Thirdly, it aimed to transform the country's current condition into a more modern and progressive one. The Government then saw ICTs positively as an important channel for socio-economic transition.

Indeed, it is hard to deny the potential value of ICTs. In the context of social and physical development, ICTs enhance socio-economic growth through knowledge sharing and empowering people. Knowledge sharing is enhanced, for example, by access to the Internet enabling people to identify, produce, process, transform, distribute and use information and gather new knowledge more easily. On-line networking holds out the promise of frequent communication in more interactive ways, allowing efficient exchange of information and knowledge. New knowledge will emerge as a result of interplay between individual effort and social interaction through electronic networking (Kenny, 1996).

A combination of information and new knowledge supports empowerment rather than dependency. On-line networking is capable of creating linkages and building solidarity between members; this further leads to the construction and formation of new power relations in a society. This means that people with access to ICTs will gain knowledge that empowers them to achieve their own goals. Examples have shown how Internet communication has determined the success of several public unions and organizations in achieving their goals and mission. Among these are; the Justice of Janitors, a campaign by the Service Employees International Union which successfully organized janitor workers in California's Silicon Valley through Internet correspondence (Bishop & Levine, 1999); the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions using worldwide networking to gain support from unionists in other countries and, the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers, which successfully utilized the on-line medium to coordinate their campaign against Firestone (Bishop & Levine, 1999).

It is argued that in the case of marginal communities, access to ICTs and information/knowledge will help people to combat poverty and inequality. A study by Oi (2004) shows how knowledge creation and transfer plays an important role in changing the economic activities and social life of people in rural areas. The study indicates that new knowledge gained through a virtual medium had successfully changed a traditional agricultural product in rural mountainous regions of Southwest Korea into a new high-technology product. This experience acknowledged that without ICTs, the accumulation of information and new knowledge was barely possible. Therefore, those who are excluded will remain unproductive and marginalized from the mainstream of society and development. Nath's (2001; p.318) statement confirms this point of view:

“The one resource that liberates people from poverty and empowers them is knowledge. Possessing knowledge is empowering, while the lack of knowledge is debilitating”.

New information technologies have also made it possible for women to access new and different kinds of knowledge (Harcourt, 1998). Previously, it has been claimed that differentiation in access to power, economic opportunities and resources between men and women were particularly due to gender inequality and discrimination. Generating knowledge through on-line networks can thus help open up new opportunities for women to freely articulate and share their experiences, concerns and knowledge with others. On-line networks enhance their accessibility and are further enriched through meeting a different range of network users. For example, the coming age of the Internet in the early 1990s has benefited several woman activists in the Asia Pacific Region. One feminist organization, Ashkara, located in Bombay, India, has developed on-line training for young feminists all over India by using specialist software and developing teaching tools (Katz, 1988). ICTs and knowledge exchange here not only help to empower women, but “are instrumental in helping women break from the stereotypical structures and narrow outlooks of the society and from the hegemony of male dominated societal structures” (Nath, 2001; p.320). Similarly, a study by Hartcut (1998) demonstrates that access to on-line networks and worldwide knowledge has helped rural African women to become self-empowering and become a symbol of successful transgression of borders within their communities.

3.2 Governmentality, Discourse and Power/Knowledge

The above mentioned examples reflect some of the promises brought by ICTs that help to promote these new technologies and encourage adoption by all Malaysians. However, the introduction of ICT policy can also be regarded as a means for the Government to exercise power over society. Foucault's better-known observations of "power/knowledge" appear to be a "new" way to explain the role of ICT policy in relation to the attitude of the Government and society in Malaysia.

Discourse

Foucault's idea of power/knowledge attracts attention to how power relations are positioned in the context of "discourse" (Foucault, 1991; p.51); that is "in an economy of discourse" (Paterson, 2001; p.1). In his book *The Archeology of Knowledge* Foucault refers to "discourse" as "the general domain of all statements" (Mills, 2003; p.53) which contains particular meanings and also effects. Mills (2003) suggests that discourse exists due to competition in order to remain dominant and to keep the place safe within a particular authority's practice(s). She writes:

".....we should, rather think of a discourse as existing because of a complex set of practices which try to keep them in circulation and other practices which try to fence them off from others and keep those other statements out of circulation." (p.54)

Foucault stresses that discourse is always associated with power. It is a claim about how a discourse or statement is authorized and thus supported that leads it to be accepted as meaningful and true. Mills (2003; p.65) clarifies this as below:

"Not everybody is able to make statements, or to have statements taken seriously by others. Some statements are more authorized than others, in that they are more associated with those in positions of power or with institution."

The relevance of power in discourse is also related to two other important terms: "truth" and "falsity". Foucault claims that only those in positions of authority (who have power) are seen as "experts" who can speak the truth. However, Mills (2003)

alleges that “the notion of truth is not being taken as self-evident” (p.58) rather, it is “supported materially by a whole range of practices and institutions, for example, universities, Government departments, publishing houses, scientific bodies and so on” (p.58). Mills (2003) further argues that all these institutions work to exclude statements that they characterise as false. Instead, they only keep in circulation those statements which are characterised as true.

The case of Malaysia’s ICT policy is reminiscent of Foucault’s idea: the Government acted as a body that used their authoritative power to spread the discourse of ICTs to the whole society. Through technological expertise such as the National Information Technology Council (NITC) advisory group chaired by the Prime Minister himself, every word, regulation and initiative stated in ICT policy is seen as a “truth” proclamation. Hence, the Government is striving very hard to support their plan or to keep “the truth of their discourse” in a variety of ways, manifestos and programmes. In this manner, the “true” discourse is seen as legitimating activities through the provision of reasons and principles. This attitude shows how a particular “regime of rationality” (Smart, 1985; p.72) simultaneously forms rules and procedures for accomplishing goals.

Power/knowledge

Conventional thinking views knowledge and/or scientific knowledge as associated with geniuses such as Einstein, Pasteur and Newton; the people who are able to formulate new ideas and contribute to the world of new inventions and discoveries (Mills, 2003). However, in Foucault’s view, knowledge is interpreted in a slightly different way. Rather than concern about new knowledge, Foucault is more interested in a “mechanism by which knowledge comes into being and is produced” (Mills, 2003; p.68).

In relation to power/knowledge, Foucault has made an important statement of how the production of knowledge and the exercise of administrative power intertwine so enhancing each other (Paterson, 2001) and are also “depend on one another” (Mills, 2003; p.69). On one hand, Foucault has claimed that power mechanisms through data gathering and information from people and their activities will produce different types

of knowledge. The knowledge gathered further reinforces the exercises of power of the people themselves. On the other hand, Foucault claims that those who are in power always have specialist knowledge and information.

One example which helps to explain this is by observing the role of Information Technology (IT) experts. In this particular case, we would only accumulate “knowledge” from the IT experts with some dichotomous conditions that such a discourse will bring forward. The expertise present in the discourse of their knowledge (for an audience) is used to diagnose a condition. Because they own a specific discourse and knowledge, their word is always considered authoritative and “true”.

The complexities of Foucault’s power/knowledge ideas suggest a new understanding of how knowledge is becoming a fundamental part of the struggle over power. At the same time, power is also seen as “not possible” without knowledge. Foucault enlightens this idea in his essay entitled “Prison Talk” (cited in Mills, 2003; p.63):

“...it is possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power.”

Following Foucault’s analytical model of how knowledge constitutes power highlights the way the governing systems work in Malaysia’s ICT policy. It is argued that the Government has created their expertise (knowledge) within a discourse that emerges in the form of statements of (public) policy. Becoming the authority on (considering) this new knowledge, the Government exercises their power by circulating the benefit of ICT discourse that they believe or claim as “true” (with regards to their manifestos and objectives). By this means, the “true” discourse is incorporated into phrases such as “ICTs is fundamental for the country’s development,” which will help transform all Malaysians into an information society and a knowledge society. Therefore, the discourse itself has become “new knowledge” to the recipient, the audience, the society. Public institutions such as universities, schools, government sectors, actors and many other State-Government agencies will play their respective roles in supporting and implementing the discourse/policy.

Teaching systems have been changed to become ICT-based, whereby all teachers are required to attend computer class or special ICT courses and all students now have to take Computers as a subject. University students are introduced to distance and virtual learning, working from home or by remote, employing new tools of technology and promoting new computer procedures. Families are encouraged to have at least one computer at home and people of all ages are encouraged to learn computing. E-government is replacing the old administration mechanisms, requiring people to have at least basic ICT knowledge if they wish to deal with the Government. These are a few examples of how Malaysian society has been reshaped by the Government's power/knowledge. From a slightly different perspective, the policy can also be viewed as partly about the Government's political agenda and as a way to remain fresh with new ideas and to maintain legitimate authority by disseminating contemporary knowledge.

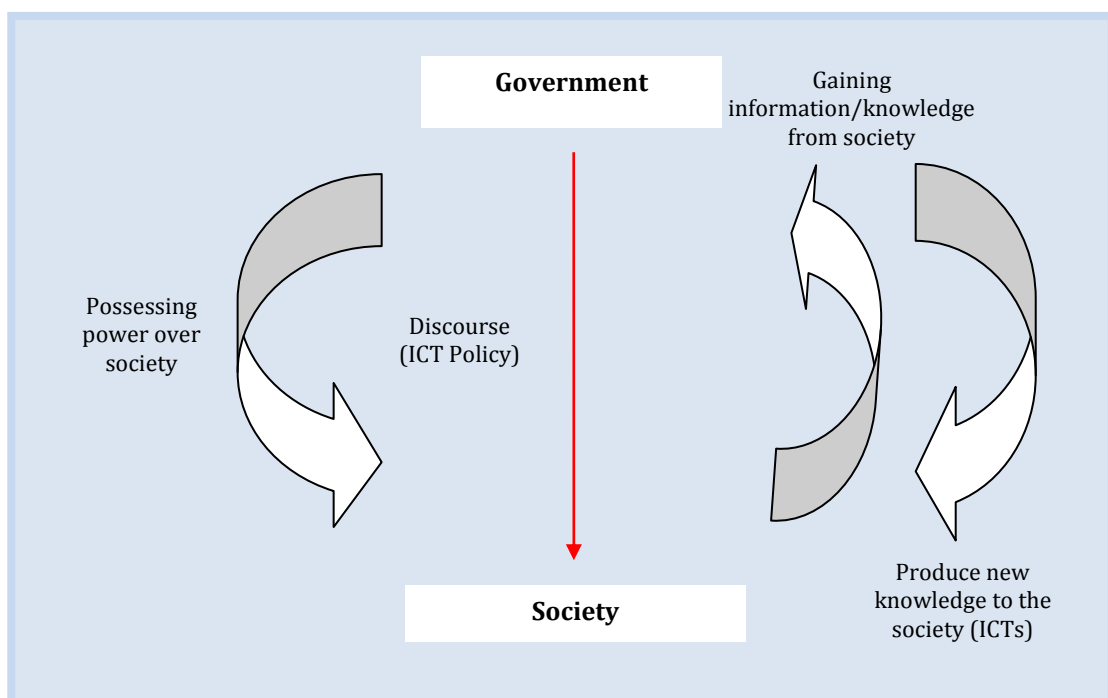


Figure 3.1: Discourse and Power/Knowledge in the case of Malaysia's ICT Policy

3.3 Discourse, Power/Knowledge and Resistance in Society

Earlier discussions on governmentality, discourse and power/knowledge have focused on the perspective of the Government of the state whereby the Malaysian Government is referred to as a subject of power regarding the formulation and implementation of the national ICT policy in the country. Interestingly, Foucault's dimension of discourse and power relations is not limited to the idea that power can only be exercised and imposed from the apex of a social hierarchy, but that it can also act as a main agent in determining power relations "between institutions, groups and individuals" (Paterson, 2001; p.1). In other words, power, in Foucault's conception, can exist and be exercised from "a variety of points in the social structure" (Smart, 1985; p.122), linking them as a set of networked nodules.

The second part of this discussion attempts to investigate the possibility of power in another section of the social structure. The main questions are: how power could possibly exist within society, and why? In spite of claiming discourse as a reciprocal mechanism in possessing power/knowledge, Foucault (cited in Rouse, 2005) argues that discourse and creation of new knowledge would also be a starting point for resistance. This resistance will be the basis for others (e.g. the opposition parties) to take an opportunity to manifest new power. Foucault (cited in Paterson, 2001; p.2) clearly highlights this in the following statement:

"Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the concept's complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it."

Power is associated with resistance – which means that resistance is present everywhere power is exercised. The complexity of power relations influences the formation of multiple resistances, challenges and difficulties, as Smart (1985) claims: "society without relations of power and therefore forms of resistance is in Foucault's view inconceivable" (p.133). Therefore, the issue of discourse, power/knowledge and resistance in the context of ICT policy in Malaysia can be viewed from two different

perspectives. First, the difficulties in ICT's implementation and the prospect of creating information and knowledge society and; second, the power/knowledge's effects over the populace.

Since 1996, the Malaysian Government has initiated many programs and agendas to ensure the success of ICT's implementation across wider society. Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), Demonstrator Application Grant Schemes (DAGS) and Bridging Digital Divide (BDD) are among the programmes that have been successfully carried out. In spite of positive growth and development which surfaces in business and trade sectors in the country, there are lots of issues remaining.

The digital divide is one of many problems that is still regarded as a national concern. According to the latest research, the digital divide in Malaysia emerges in terms of rural-urban inequality (Abu Bakar & Crump, 2005). Despite the gradual increment in the number of Internet subscribers, national statistics have shown that 93% were concentrated in urban areas. The divide also occurs among low education, non-professional occupations and across different generations (Harris, et al., 2007). Researchers such as Abu Bakar and Crump (2005) suggest that the problem of digital inequality in Malaysia is due to two factors: "1) uncoordinated efforts between groups of digital divide campaigners and 2) no standard approach to overcome the problem" (p.2). Both factors indicate programme overlaps and repetition. This happened when the Government and other prime national companies such as Telekom Malaysia Berhad (TMB) and multinational companies like IBM, Motorola and Fujitsu made their own efforts to eradicate the problem (of the digital divide). In addition, there have been claims that the digital divide in rural Malaysia not only exists as a result of weaknesses in the Government's implementation programmes but in some cases¹, it was due to political marginalisation. The Government is said to have disregarded some rural areas that are under opposition political administration, such as the State of Kelantan (Syed Mohammed Alhabshi, 2004). Therefore ICT execution areas where ICT was not developed remain a "black hole" (Park, 2004; p.283) for the whole mission of achieving an information/knowledge society in the country.

¹ This refers to a case study in fishing district in Tumpat Kelantan by Syed Muhammed Alhabshi (2004).

As earlier discussed, the MSC is considered a major initiative to change Malaysia's industrial base into a knowledge-based economy. Despite the impressive progress reported, the MSC has also faced some major unresolved issues. This was clearly reported by Mohd. Salleh (2001) in his research that focused on MSC's progress and evaluation based on Michael Porter's Competitive Advantage of Nation's model. This model identified five current characteristics of the industrial structure of East Asian countries including Malaysia. They are:

“a) appearance of extreme high-tech orientation but does not really indicate their true fundamental technological capabilities; b) dependence on external sources of innovation which caused home-grown technological capability to be generally weak; c) insufficient pool of knowledge workers and talents to localise the innovation function, thus may thwart growth in these economies; d) lack of local base of supporting industries and caused general weakness of industrial clusters and lack of competitiveness of indigenous enterprise; and e) weakness of domestic sector due to the unbalanced treatment of the export and domestic sectors and this has far-reaching economic consequences”

(Mohd. Salleh, 2001; p.6).

Based on these characteristics, Mohd. Salleh indicates that the current situation of MSC Malaysia lies in several traits. The first is a critical mass of technical and management knowledge pools as Malaysia still lacks knowledge workers. This remains a great challenge if the country is to achieve its national target. A speech by the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation Malaysia confirms this stance:

“At present Malaysia lacks the critical mass of qualified scientists, engineers and related professionals that are much needed to drive the k-economy. In 2004, Malaysia had only 21 research scientists and engineers (RSEs) for every 10,000 workforce. The target set in the Ninth Malaysia is to achieve 50 RSEs per 10,000 workforces by the year 2020”.

(Jarjis, 2006; p.7)

The second characteristic noted in Mohd. Salleh's research is a critical mass of entrepreneurs, especially in the ICT sectors and, the third characteristic is the uncertain capability of MSC to attract world class ICT companies. Mohd. Salleh (2001) concludes that these issues could be overcome by taking lessons from other successful science and technology hubs such as the United States' Silicon Valley. According to

him, failing to do so will result in MSC Malaysia being an unsuccessful initiative towards the dream of a knowledge-based economy.

The digital divide and MSC issues are amongst the real obstacles to achieving the national vision, the sticking point of all efforts that have been implemented by the Government. These issues could be seen as a hindrance to the implementation of the policy itself and, at the same time, dispute the Government's discourse and power/knowledge. Why has this happened and what factors contributed to it? Rouse (2005) argues that resistance existed due to constraints instigated by the Government over the population. He claims that more extensive knowledge will lead to more continuous and pervasive control over people that would limit people's rights for free action and voice. This further leads to "possibilities for more intrusive disclosure" (Rouse, 2005; p.99), which in turn demonstrates resistance over the Government's power.

Rouse's perspective is relevant here in terms of public policies that involve communal judgment and evaluation. For example, in Malaysia, the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP/DEB) in 1971 (see Chapter 1 for details) has blazed controversies within the country. The policy, introduced purposely to eradicate poverty and reorganize social structures in Malaysia, has been misinterpreted by certain ethnic groups such as Chinese and Indian citizens. These groups refer to the policy as a Government discrimination agenda since the implementation of the policy's agendas were seen as more likely to protect and benefit "only" Malay people. This case shows an example of how a "true" statement can be dismissed, misunderstood or even never considered by society "not because they are thought to be false but because it is not clear what it would amount to for them to be either true or false" (Rouse, 2005; pp.96-97). Therefore, when uncertainty occurs, the discourse is no longer relevant and intensifies the resistance over the power. NEP/DEB is only one example amongst many others. In countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, the execution of some of the Government's policy was claimed to be responsible for uncontrollable demonstrations, protests, rallies and strikes that most of the time led to the Government changing regime.

Conversely, the cases of the digital divide and MSC have demonstrated slightly different standpoints. The issues are not related to the discontented (in society) but rather to the way they have been received by various ethnic minorities. Resistance to ICT policy within the context of the digital divide and MSC are related to the issue of inequality in ICT access as well as problems associated with social capability. Unlike developed countries, Malaysia still lags behind in terms of education levels, quality of life, human capital and also national economic growth. This contributes to difficulties in the implementation of such ICT agendas.

The second argument concentrates on how discourse, power/knowledge and resistance can be interpreted in the context of society. Foucault asserts that power is not only possessed by a dominant agent, it is not merely from those in authority but rather, that power can exist everywhere because it has actually been “distributed throughout complex social networks” (Rouse, 2005; p.109). This means that power can exist in society, can be possessed by society and amongst society. Therefore, power can occur in many ways and would operate at every level within social structures, even in private spheres of the family (e.g. between parents and children), gender relations (e.g. between man and woman) and also in the public fields of politics, the economy and law.

In the case of ICT policy and implementation in Malaysia, it is argued that the policy itself is responsible for power circulating throughout wider society. It is in the condition of power relations between rulers and the ruled. In the first place, the Government acts as a dominant agent that holds power over society through the introduction of ICTs. Many initiatives and programs embedded in the ICT agenda have opened possible benefits to society as a whole. The tremendous growth of mobile phone users, incremental increase in Internet subscribers and the emergence of thousands of on-line community websites and personal blogs in Malaysia are a good sign for the future of ICT in the country. Many Malaysians have now become experts in ICT areas, with huge opportunities in IT education now available for those interested. It is argued that through ICT discourse the Government has indirectly transferred important knowledge to society. Therefore, it is important to note here that power is no longer seen as a negative entity, repressing what it seeks to control.

Instead, it becomes productive when it traverses and produces things that induce pleasure and form new knowledge to others.

Yet, from the perspective of society, new knowledge (of ICTs) is seen to give people new power; in this sense, the experts from the bottom level (the general public) who own new power/knowledge may possibly generate forms of resistance against the Government's vision and mission. This can be seen in two potential conditions: firstly, by manipulating knowledge from ICTs for their own interests and desires and, secondly, by possessing power/knowledge over others, especially among non-experts for certain goals and missions.

The technical progress and achievements shown by ICT sectors in Malaysia are undeniable. However, there will always be unforeseen consequences that follow, which could potentially affect the well being of society, especially the young. Besides the substantial advantages gained, the Internet and mobile phone technology have given rise to a host of potentially worrying issues such as computer hacking, pornography sites, gambling and identity fraud.

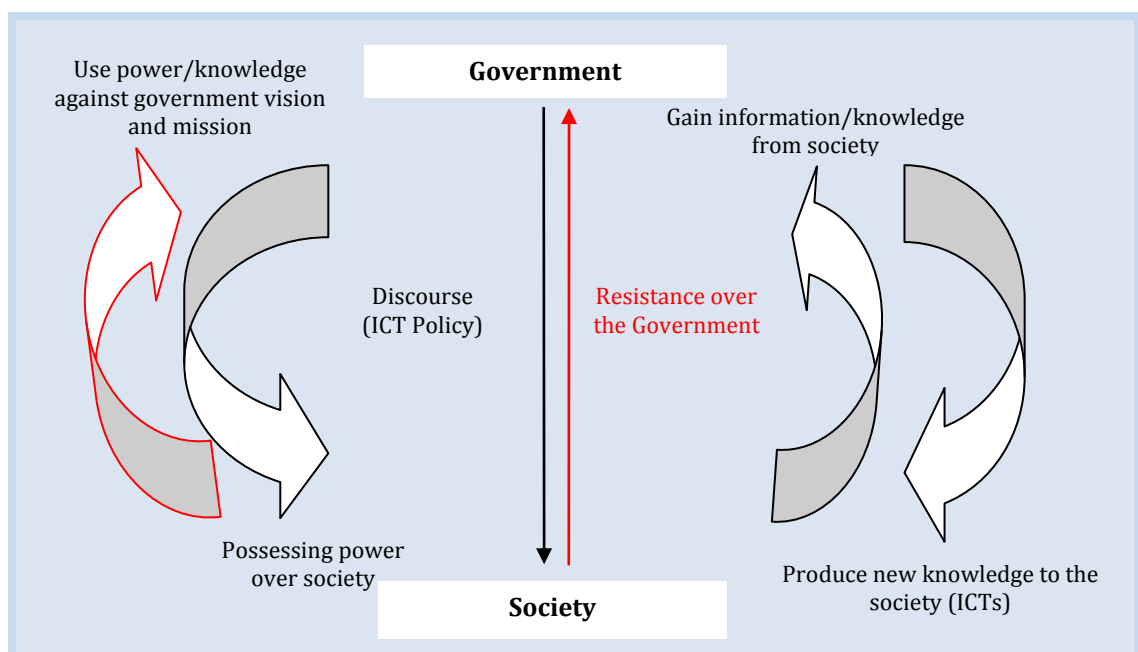


Figure 3.2: Discourse, Power/Knowledge and Resistance in the Case of Malaysia's ICT Policy

The impact of ICTs on political and social reformation has increasingly become a national issue as many Malaysians are now using on-line media for spreading personal political views and propaganda. Considering free voice and expression, ICTs are now becoming a popular medium for re-formulating civil society and organizations. They also act as a preferable public sphere and a medium for seeking democracy. In fact, many in civil societies all over the world are now using the Internet as an alternative channel to present their expressions, as well as to provide a new space for widening political discussion. There are thousands of websites run by civil society groups across the globe. In Pakistan for example, the Internet has become an option for Muslims to develop their Islamic *jihadi* group (Khan, 2004). In Thailand, there is 'Pantip.com' established in 1997, which serves as a discussion space on politics, the economy and social issues (Daorueng, 2004). Meanwhile, 'Fateha.com' acts as a voice for "marginal ethnic Malays" in Singapore (Mohamad Sharif, 2004).

In Malaysia, ICT policy and development, which was intended to increase social and economic gains, also created a new space for different forms of political expression. Since the introduction of ICT-based technologies and applications in the country, many Malaysians have turned their media interests to the Internet especially to discuss and exchange views freely on a variety of issues. *Malaysiakini* (Malaysia Today) is one of the alternative media websites that successfully provides a wider democratic space. This website is not owned by any political parties or groups but rather focuses on political news and commentaries that are the most censored information in the mainstream media (Yee Siong, 2004). However, *Malaysiakini* has to contend with national political pressures and market forces since the country's socio and political situation does not permit totally free voices. Although people are allowed free opinions and thought, they remain bound to certain restrictions due to country's multi-racial nature. Discussion and views are allowed as long as they do not touch upon ethnic or religious sensitivities. In May 2001, Deputy Home Affairs Minister, Chor Chee Heung told the Parliament that the Government would not hesitate to take legal action if any reports, letters or discussions in *Malaysiakini* (also other related blog sites) were seen to create racial tension or compromise national security (Yee Siong, 2004). The censorship of new media in Malaysia reflects the Government's determination to promote new technologies as long as they do not affect national tranquillity.

While censorship has been practiced in various virtual media websites such as *Malaysiakini*, other new technology platforms are still available and unrestrained. E-mail, short message systems (SMS) and on-line broadcasting, for instance, remains a potential threat for the whole of society. This was evident in a case in December 2002 whereby an irresponsibly forwarded e-mail claiming the Petronas Twin Towers were the next target of terrorism created a national panic. In 1998, four Malaysians were arrested under the Internal Security Act (ISA) for sending e-mails claiming that Indonesian migrants had attacked Malaysians with machetes in Kuala Lumpur. Recently, there was a case of a 24-year-old Malaysian Media Studies student, Wee Meng Chee, known as 'Namewee' who allegedly composed an offending rap song that was a parody of the national anthem, *Negaraku* (My Country). Namewee, in his renamed song *Negaraku* combined a mixture of Mandarin and Hokkien languages and was charged with composing a number of offensive issues relating to ethnic and religious sensitivity. The song sung by Namewee himself aired as a six-minute rap video on YouTube. It has been viewed by over half a million people from all over the world (*Malaysiakini*, 2007).

On-line communities are another new phenomenon in society that informs debates of how human-computer interaction could possibly affect the development of social relations. People's behaviour has hardly been controlled and the way they interact with each other involves a dynamic process that may take time for the consequences to evolve.

On-line communities,² also known as virtual, electronic or cyber, can be described as:

“...cultural aggregations that emerge when enough people bump into each other often enough in cyberspaces. A virtual community is a group of people who may or may not meet one another face to face, and who exchange words and ideas through the mediation of community bulletin boards and networks.”

(Rheingold, 1994; pp.57-58)

² This definition of on-line communities was produced by Howard Rheingold, well-known as a Cyberspace Guru, resulting from his seven-year involvement in Whole Earth 'Electronic Link (WELL), an early on-line community website developed in the San Francisco Bay Area. There are a lot more definitions related to this new form of community and it has been described in many ways from different point of views; from multidisciplinary, technological, e-commerce and also from sociological perspectives (Preece, 2000).

Unlike conventional communities that are defined by physical features, size, location and boundaries, on-line communities exist by means of fully technological support. They contribute to the substitution of face-to-face interaction and also offer an interactive way of communication. The implication of on-line communities is that users are able to communicate with each other, find information and navigate the community software with ease. Many activities that we do in the real world can also be done in on-line communities. As Rheingold (1994, p.58) writes:

“In cyberspace, we chat and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, perform acts of commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games and meta-games, flirt....We do everything people do when people get together, but we do it with words on computer screens, leaving our bodies behind...our identities commingle and interact electronically, independent of local time and location.”

On-line communities are seen as a place that conjures warm and friendly spaces, place where people can interact and help each other. They are also a place where social groups can share goals, interests and satisfy each others' needs. However, despite numerous desirable promises that can be brought about by on-line social interaction, the impact of on-line activities on social change is still dependent on several social variables such as ethnicity, class and gender. In some circumstances, domination in ICT skills and access by certain groups (e.g. white men, middle classes and women) can be perceived as a threat, a path to inequality in technologies used and adopted. In fact, misleading attitudes and behaviours of these social groups may possibly change the technological advantages to relatively severe social disadvantages.

In Malaysia, the development of on-line communities is highly promoted by the Government through various initiatives and support. Since the introduction of ICTs in the country, the authorities have considered new on-line social groups as an appropriate medium for all Malaysians to maximize their levels of communication and integration. Yet, immaturity in socio-political and economic conditions may lead to relatively unexpected results. As a plural country with long standing ethnic issues and socio-economic inequalities, the existence of on-line communities could possibly construct both positive and negative impacts. From a positive perspective, on-line communities might influence social interaction between people regardless of ethnicity, class and

gender. Conversely, they can also be a platform for worsening ethnic polarisation, increasing class differentials and as a medium for gender discrimination.

Accessibility and the digital divide are two important factors that influence the adoption and use of technology. These will significantly impact on the formation of on-line communities in terms of numbers and socio-characteristics of the members. As mentioned earlier, access to the Internet in Malaysia is still low, especially among those who live in rural areas. The access cost, which is relatively high in comparison to other developed countries, has been limited to those who have high incomes to subscribe and get access to the Internet at home. The rest are mostly connected to the Internet in their work place. Limited access to only urban dwellers and high-income earners will cause an imbalanced proportion of members in the communities in terms of ethnicity, class and gender. Domination by certain groups affects networks' composition and circulation of information and knowledge. Therefore, the social capital that is claimed to be an essence of social networks could not reach as extensively across society as suggested. This means that those who are not participating (in on-line communities) will be excluded from the networks and therefore miss the chance to accumulate wider information and knowledge.

The nature of on-line communities can also be a threat to the Government in certain circumstances. The introduction of ICTs in Malaysia is clearly inspired by the National Vision 2020 that outlines regulations for the country to achieve national development within the context of social solidarity and national unity. The questions are: will these two missions parallel in progress? Is society making good use of the advances of ICTs in line with the Government's mission and vision? And whether the existence of on-line communities will help to generate and maintain social capital within the communities? On-line communities can be freely developed by any group or individuals for any reasons, goals or purposes. With the ability to control technologies and audience through their own specific knowledge of ICTs, it is possible for these experts to make use of the opportunities in a way that fulfils their own interests. The community's creator has a legitimate authority to plan, guide and shape the characteristics of such communities. The "registering" process to become a community's member, for instance, may have a strong impact on the formation of the community's identity. Therefore, it is possible for everyone to participate in their

preferred on-line communities. Ironically, people may take part and be in social groups representing their respective ethnic enclave, class, gender or religious affiliations. Despite the hope to accelerate multi-ethnic interaction and communications, on-line communities could be a place for creating a new social order and ethnic polarisation.

3.4 Conclusion

The introduction of ICT policy in Malaysia surges ahead of general understanding not only of its economic impact but more importantly, in terms of its social and political impacts. The use and adoption of new technologies were expected to bring new hope for national social change. ICT is a new media that can deliver both positive and negative consequences. The Internet is a “super invented technology” that is able to contribute a wide range of information, knowledge and applications. However, it is also the source of false information and knowledge, a site for cultural resources and a new channel that allows identity fraud and technological manipulation.

One way of describing the paradox of new technology and its effects on society is to use the concept of power/knowledge that was introduced by Michael Foucault. The concept’s application to the use and adoption of ICTs in Malaysia has brought the possibility of two-fold consequences; first, how discourse and new knowledge would help the Government to operate through dispersed mechanisms of power over society and second, how circulation of power/knowledge may also create resistance to the Government’s discourse and governmentality.

In the particular case of on-line communities, the practice of computer mediated communication (CMC) has provided a new form of interactive communication between community members. This helps to invent a new form of social process and, with respect to the concept of power/knowledge, expert and knowledgeable members who are assumed to become more dominant in determining the form of socialization and types of interaction in the community. Overall, the essence of this discussion is to focus on the social processes that take place in the society due to the greater use and adoption of ICTs. In order to explore the stage of development of ICTs in Malaysia, it is important to look at the way society acts and responds to the innovation. It is argued

that the way in which ICT is introduced, implemented and adopted remains unequal in relation to class, ethnicity, region or socio-economic background of the people in a country. The chapter argues the use of governmentality assists on understanding this ICT discourse that has taken place.

Chapter 4

DISCURSIVE ON-LINE NETWORKS, SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN ON-LINE COMMUNITIES: A THEORETICAL REVIEW AND PAST RESEARCH

4. 0 Introduction

This chapter seeks to review theoretical frameworks and past studies to provide a basis for this current research into on-line networks, social capital and social integration. This chapter is divided into three parts. Part one will focus on the discussion of on-line networks and network society. Initial arguments on networks society theories by influential scholars such as Manuel Castells and Barry Wellman are further examined within this section. Part two addresses the concept of social capital and a review of past research focusing on on-line communities and the formation of on-line social capital. Part three focuses on the issue of inter-ethnic integration in Malaysia. It covers arguments and relevant debates of nationalism and national unity and explores previous research on ethnicity and class integration.

4.1 On-line Networks and Network Society

Human beings form social groups. They share feelings of unity and are bound together in relatively stable patterns of interaction. The importance of relationships in daily life has created the need for networks between individuals and within groups. People tend to link together by one or more social relationship, thus forming a chain or social network either by personal or direct social ties. By definition, social networks can be referred to as social structures made of nodes, which are generally individuals, groups or organizations. They indicate the ways in which people are connected through various social familiarities ranging from casual acquaintances to close family bonds (Ethier, 2004).

The concept of social networks was introduced by nineteenth century sociologists such as Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tonnies (Scott & Marshall, 2005). Tonnies (1963, p.33) introduced two significant concepts of social ties – “Gemeinschaft” and “Gesellschaft” – to differentiate social network patterns that normally exist within social groups. The social group which underlies Gemeinschaft tends to link those who share values and beliefs. For Tonnies, the networking which develops within this group is based on more personal levels and thus form close relationship. In contrast, Gesellschaft refers to social links characterized by formal and instrumental networks. Furthermore, Durkheim (1964) explains social networks in a more post-traditional understanding of community. Durkheim introduced two significant concepts of “mechanical solidarity” and “organic solidarity” to explain the role of shared norms and values in maintaining social cohesion in society. While the former indicates that in pre-industrial societies, social integration rested on shared beliefs and values embedded in the collective conscience of the members; the latter exists due to the advent of industrial society where interdependence arises out of socialization and differentiation. In Durkheim’s view, with organic solidarity, moral restraints on egoism arise out of association and form the basis of social cohesion (Scott & Marshall, 2005).

The introduction of new information and communication technologies (ICTs), especially the Internet, has increased the popularity of computer mediated

communication (CMC)¹ and brought a new dimension to the concept of social networks. Manuel Castells (2003), a prominent sociologist, suggests that the old concept of networks in human practice has been advanced with the presence of these new technologies. Old networks, according to Castells, are substituted with new information networks, powered by the Internet. Living in the information age, advanced technologies such as the Internet play a central role in opening up social spaces that offer more flexibility and fluidity in the networking process. The mode of networking can now happen faster, not only from one person to another, but from many people to many others, at any time and on a global scale. For this reason, Castells (2003) argues that we are now living in a new form of society, that is, “the network society” (p.2).

The theory of network societies², as introduced by Manuel Castells (1996, 1997, 2000), provides a critical framework for examining this new phenomenon in present-day society. Castells (2003) argues that the operational and organizational structure of a network society is common in the information age. He defines a network society as a social structure that is characterized by networks, communication technologies and information processing. These include a global economic interdependence among nations, as well as individual social movements and identity. Based on this definition, Castells (2000) hypothesized that network societies are organized around two new forms of time and space: “timeless time” and the “space of flows”.

For “timeless time”, Castells (in Webster, 2006) argues that time is constantly manipulated by “electronically managed global capital markets” (p.108) and this relates to how work time is increasingly “flextime” (p.108) in order to maximize its most effective use. The “network society”, in Castells’ thinking, may induce a “blurring of lifestyles” (p.109) characteristic of the “breaking down of rhythm city” (p.109), such as manipulating human biological stages of life. Castells gives an example of how a 58-

¹ CMC refers to the use of computer and telecommunication networks to compose, store and deliver communication. CMC comprises a variety of interactive socio-technical modes including e-mail, discussion lists and newsgroups, chat, Multi-user Dimensions (MUDs), Object Oriented (MOO), I See You (ICQ) and Instant Messaging (IM). Of these, e-mail and discussion groups have been in existence since the early 1970s; chat and social MUDs and MOOs date to the late 1980s and ICQ and IMs were introduced in the mid 1990s. All these CMC modes are textual, involving typing words that are read on computer screens (Herring, 2001).

² Human communication through computer networks was predicted in 1968 by Licklider and Tylor, research directors for the United States Department of Defense’s Advanced Research Project Agency (ARPA), who believed that in many years, men would be able to communicate more effectively through machines than face-to-face (Forester, 1980).

year-old woman is now able to resist her ageing through exercise regimes, drugs and cosmetic surgery. In other words, the concept of “timeless time” could be considered a genetic engineering breakthrough, which Castells links to information and communication matters contributing to the promotion of a culture of timelessness.

The concept of “space of flow” implies that physical distances are closer among organizations in society, whereas information can be easily transmitted from one point to another by new means of communication technology. This brings a new meaning of eradication of a logical concept of space. For example, the hyperlink on a webpage collapses a succession of things in time and space because it brings one location to another in an instant. As Castells (2000) states: “Space and Time, the material foundations of human experience, have been transformed, as the space of flows dominates the space of places and timeless time supersedes clock time of the industrial era” (p.34). According to this claim, Castells understands the network as a set of interrelated nodes whose flows maintain their structure as a whole. However, he argues that if the flow disappears, the network will also tend to disappear. In his 1996 publication *The Rise of the Network Society*, Castells suggests that “as a historical trend, dominant functions and processes in the Information Age are increasingly organised around networks” (p.469). Accordingly, exclusion from the network is to be prevented from access to social, economic and political power. He also warns that one network can subsume another which is less powerful. By this, he suggests that networks can modify all existing structures of “production, experience, power and culture” (p.472).

Similar to Castells, Foucault (in Munro, 2000) argues that power is not simply repressive but is best understood as a relationship between forces. He believes that network power is currently transforming social relations and allowing other forms of power to be brought to bear. For Foucault, power and knowledge influence and inspire each other, and it is these processes that create types of people, practices and institutions for dealing with them. These processes do not come under the heading of specific relationships (time, place, player or institution), but take place all the time, everywhere.

Wellman (1999b), on the other hand, suggests that today’s communities are clearly networks and no longer neatly organized into little neighborhood boxes. He

claims that people usually have more friends outside their residential communities than within them and indeed, many people have more ties outside their metropolitan areas than within them. Communities normally consist of far-flung kinship, workplaces, interest groups and neighborhood ties that link together in a series or chain. They form a network that provides aid, support, social control and links to other milieu. For Wellman, such networks furnish opportunity, maneuverability and uncertainty. In every networking chain, there is a chance to find resources in a number of social circles rather than a single network member. Wellman argues that uncertainty exists due to limited scope, low density and porous boundaries of any one network which makes it harder to identify with and find support from a single solidarity group.

Such debates, which are ongoing in the information society literature, suggest that the formation of social structures is highly dependent on ICTs. One important aspect in the creation and maintenance of this new social configuration relates to the way people interact with each other. This includes transmission of social norms over time and space, either on a “face-to-face” or on a “non-face-to-face” basis. Giddens (1984) describes the conditions of these two types of interactions as being those of “presence” and “absence”. He further suggests that interactions in present times are increasingly being structured under conditions of absence rather than presence. Social interactions on a non-face-to-face basis, or as Giddens suggests as “absent”, are typically mediated by the use of early telecommunication technologies and tools such as telephones, fax machines, and televisions. With increased levels of technology, development and globalization, ICTs help to intensify this absence of inter-connections between people and their social lives. Today, non-face-to-face communication brought about by the advancement of the Internet radically effects the organization of our lives and influences how we view ourselves (Walsham, 1998).

The growing popularity of inter-connections and activities between people in the virtual world have increased various research interests in on-line social networks (see for example Turkle, 1996; Rheingold, 1994; Grodin & Lindlof, 1996). Case studies, observations and various forms of Internet ethnography have provided rich descriptions of life on-line. Questions about “who relates to whom” and “about what” were examined using social network analysis (Wellman, 2002) and various forms of data logging have been used to track communities and their network activities. Studies at

different levels initiate a variety of debates, such as how networking and other electronic communications are facilitating on-line communities and how supporting sociability and designing for usability can help produce successful on-line communities (Preece, 2000).

4.2 Social Capital - An Important Asset of Networks

In reference to the bodies of past research, one of the reasons social networks are studied was to understand and map connections between one individual to others and how this can determine the social capital that formed between them. In this context, “social capital” refers to the network position of the object or node and consists of the ability to draw on resources contained within members of the network (Kadushin, 2004). Basically, the more mappings a person has in his/her chain of social networks, the more knowledge, influence and power the original person will control (Ethier, 2004). Social capital can have a substantial influence on a person’s life, affecting such aspects as job searches and potential for promotions.

4.2.1 The Concept of Social Capital

The concept of social capital has become important in development studies for several reasons. First, social capital is understood as those aspects of social relations that can be converted into other forms of capital (i.e., economic or cultural) and analysis of it is thought to thereby help explain how individuals can improve or maintain their positions in society (Bourdieu, 1977; Portes, 1998). Second, the concept is argued to have much to offer in directing attention towards aspects of development other than economic growth (Bebbington, 1999). Third, the concept is viewed as useful because of its perceived function in helping to conceptualize the role of civil society in addressing problems beyond the reach of the market and the state (Grootaert, 1999; Ostrom, 1996; Uphoff, 1993). Finally, social capital is thought to be helpful in explaining migration patterns that do not conform to the expectations of neo-classical migration theory (Palloni, et al., 2001).

There are numerous debates surrounding the definition of social capital. By looking at some conceptual works accredited to scholars such as Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1988, 1989) and Putnam (1993, 1995, 1996), social capital was defined in various ways and applied to different contexts and disciplines.

Bourdieu was amongst the earliest scholars who employed the concept of social capital in his studies. Gradually emerging from his interest in social space, Bourdieu links the concept of social capital to his other earlier-defined concepts of economic and cultural capital (Schuler, et al., 2000). Emphasizing how benefits could increase with participation of individuals or groups and how the construction of sociability will create resources, Bourdieu (quoted in Portes, 1998; p.3 and Schuller, et al., 2000; p.4) defines the concept of social capital as:

“...the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition...which provided each of its members with the backing of collectively-owned capital.”

James Coleman, on the other hand, has referred to social capital as an important element in the creation of human capital (Portes, 1998). Considerably influenced by his succession of studies in the field of education, the concept of social capital has been used to explain the relationships between educational achievement and social inequality (Schuller, et al., 2000). For Coleman, (quoted in Field, 2003; p.24) social capital can be described as:

“...the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person. These resources differ for different persons and can constitute an important advantage for children and adolescents in the development of their human capital.”

While Bourdieu and Coleman conceive of social capital predominantly from sociological and social theory, Putnam's contribution in defining the concept has been recognized from political perspectives. Putnam sparked controversy when he claimed that there has been a sizeable decline in social capital in the United States. In his series of empirical studies, Putnam used his theory of social capital to explain the

relationships between civic engagement in the community and the performance of the Government and the other social institutions. At the same time, the theory also served as a foundation to help understand the processes that led to greater community involvement.

In his early work, Putnam (1993) defines social capital as “the features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (p.167). Later, he changed the definition a little and argues that social capital can be referred to as “connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000; p.19). Based on these definitions, Putnam attempts to highlight two important notions which are interrelated and serve as essential parts of social capital. These are: (a) networks and (b) norms of trust and reciprocity. Networks, according to Putnam, are the basis of personal interactions and serve as a key process of social capital formation. People’s networks, according to Putnam, should be seen as part of a wider set of relationships and norms that allow them to pursue their goals and also serve to bind society together. In general, social networks define who people communicate with and how. By the concept of social capital, membership of networks and commitment of the members to shared values are central. From networks, individuals build personal interactions and are able to learn about the trustworthiness of other individuals he or she is related to. When trust is steadily developed, norms of reciprocity will follow, which later reinforce the establishment of ties between individuals or groups. In his further discussions, Putnam introduced two basic forms of network which underlie social capital – “bonding” and “bridging”:

“Bonding social capital is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity. Dense networks in ethnic enclaves, for example, provide crucial social and psychological support for less fortunate members of the community....Bridging networks, by contrast, are better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion.....Moreover bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrower selves.”

(Putnam, 2000; pp.22-23)

Bonding social capital is seen as an inclusive relationship that happens normally between kinship and homogenous groups of people, for example, people who come

from the same ethnicity, “tribe” or religious group. This type of social capital can also reflect on what Putnam called “vertical” or “hierarchical networks”. By bonding, Putnam suggests that social capital which emerges tends to reinforce exclusive identities; a close knit community which retains homogeneity and provides individuals with a sense of communal belonging. It represents strong ties between a group’s members which are able to undergird specific acts of reciprocity and strengthen solidarity through social support. In other words, bonding social capital serves as what Field (2003) suggests as “a kind of sociological superglue in maintaining strong in-group loyalty and reinforcing specific identities” (p.32).

Bridging social capital, on the other hand, reflects inclusive networks that tend to bring together people across diverse social divisions. It presents a “flatter” or more “horizontal” network which provides “weak ties”, mechanisms that help linkages to external assets and for information diffusion. Bridging networks create ties between diverse groups under a common network. This allows individuals to access different resources, promote shared understanding between groups, increase the flow of information and develop a broader sense of community. Also, through bridging, individual trustworthiness transfers to a wide variety of groups whereby the more complex a community of groups is, the more reliance there will be on networks for information about a person’s trustworthiness.

Although each form (of bonding and bridging social capital) is helpful in meeting different needs, considering the context of community and civic participation, bridging networks, as Putnam asserts, add more value to the development of social capital than bonding does. For instance, in his examination of civic engagement, Putnam observes that many social activities and constructed organizations such as choral societies, sports clubs, rotating credit associations and singing societies facilitate social networks which could potentially bring back “people’s connection with the life of their community” (Putnam, 1995; p.665). By this, Putnam believes that relationships which begin with loose or weak ties (bridging) may contribute to a higher level of social capital. Using a bowling league as a metaphor for a type of associational activity, Putnam argues that this kind of leisure interest could bring relative strangers together on a routine and frequent basis. This, over time, may help to build and sustain sets of networks and

values that foster general reciprocity and trust, and in turn facilitate mutual collaboration.

4.2.2 Social Capital and On-line Communities

Social capital theory, particularly since Putnam (2000), has attracted scholars' attention, especially those who are working on ICT projects in local communities. Many have begun to explore interrelationships between real and virtual communities, looking at the development and use of community networks (e.g. Schuler, 1996; Cohill & Kavanaugh, 2000; Schmitz, 1997). Underpinning much of this literature is the notion that with appropriate values and guidance, investment in local networks will provide opportunities to build social capital and so bring greater opportunities to local neighbourhoods.

Largely unsubstantiated claims have also been made in relation to the importance of new technology in society. Optimistic commentators claim that ICTs increase social capital, while pessimists suggest such technologies decrease capital and undermine social relationships in the off-line world. As an alternative to conjecture and anecdotal evidence, Quan-Haase et al. (2002) investigate how the use of the Internet and electronic interactions in Canadian communities affect social capital. The research aims to question whether "the Internet increases, decreases or supplements social capital" (p.293). The study demonstrates that the local off-line community is often supplemented by on-line interaction. This suggests that the Internet may have great potential in helping people, particularly the young, increase their social contacts. A further argument made by Quan-Haase and his colleagues (2002) was that technology provides opportunities to seek better information, e.g. political and organizational information, in an affordable and convenient way. However, those uninterested in public affairs are not likely to suddenly become interested in Internet communications. They argue that behaviour will not automatically alter as a result of using technology alone. Instead, they suggest that levels of Internet involvement will not radically affect civic engagement nor increase a sense of community.

Hampton and Wellman (2002), in their e-neighbourhood project, aim to examine relationships between Internet use and the composition of people's social networks. The study seeks to explore the potential of ICTs in expanding social networks and social capital in terms of community involvement at a neighbourhood level. A report on this project indicates that neighbourhood e-mails were found to be the most widely used amongst residents. Through the Internet, participants became more active in changing aspects of their neighbourhoods, especially on political views and local issues.

Social network analysis focuses on uncovering the patterns of people's interactions. Hampton and Wellman (2002) suggest that ICT provides huge opportunities for developing new social networks whereby inter-relationships can be strengthened through active community interactions. Similar to Hampton and Wellman, a search on literature of community ICT turned up a mass of studies that use the concepts of social networks and social capital. Most of the research findings show that technology and society shape and influence each other. There were two types of studies focusing on either: i) community ICT shaping social networks/social capital (e.g., Kavanough, 1999; Kavanough & Patterson, 1998; Blanchard & Horan, 2000; Hampton & Wellman, 2001); and ii) social networks/social capital shaping community ICT (e.g., Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Liff & Steward, 2001; Kvasny & Keil, 2002). While the former type of study found that community ICT does contribute to the formation of social capital, the latter provides evidence that social networks and social capital enhance the effectiveness of community ICT.

A set of four studies (Liff & Steward, 2001; Borgida, et al., 2002; Kvasny & Keil, 2002; Aklimat & Williams, 2001) consider social networks and social capital that already existed in the community long before the arrival of ICT. All these studies employ "asset-based community development models" elaborated by Kretzman and McKnight (1993), which suggests that all communities have their own assets that can be mobilized to improve conditions. With respect to the introduction of ICT in the selected communities, all these studies demonstrate the importance of having established social capital and social networks in determining the success of community ICT. For instance, research conducted by Aklimat and Williams in 2001 found that a strong social network with a mixture of forms of social capital (bonding and bridging)

amongst Midwestern community members has led to the growth and success of the new tele-center provided in the neighborhood area.

By extending the concept of social capital and applying it in the context of on-line communities, all studies seem to focus on the same perspective; that is, how to enhance community participation and reinforce a sense of belonging amongst members. However, the weaknesses in many of these studies were that they failed to differentiate and therefore, explain the dynamic of on-line and off-line relationships in people's lives, especially those who come from heterogeneous backgrounds. In two cross-cultural groups that typically have had little to do with one another, social capital is considered low not only because of a lack of community participation (Putnam, 2000), but also due to many other factors such as language and cultural conflicts, religious barriers as well as historical disputes (Knack & Keefer, 1997; Alesina & La Ferrara, 2000). Hence, to increase the amount of trust amongst these groups is challenging and this will affect the norms of reciprocity which underlie the formation of social capital.

4.3 Race Relations and Pluralism: Working Concepts

The problems of race and ethnicity are world phenomena and significantly influence the formation of national identity and nation building (Chew Peh, 1987; Isa, 2008). Appa Rao et al. (1977) assert that Third World countries experience prolonged crises of national identity compared to other continents. Such crises are believed to be surrounding issues of ethnicity, race, class and loyalties of the people. In countries such as South Africa and the U.S.A, ethnic tension transpires between whites and blacks as a result of their unequal social status. In Britain, people have to deal with large migrations of Asians especially from the West India and Pakistan. On the other hand, race and ethnic conflicts in South East Asia are more likely to occur "between the indigenous and settlers especially the Chinese" (Chew Peh, 1998; p.7). In Malaysia, similar inter-ethnic relation issues have taken place since the colonial era and continue to be a major concern today.

Race relations are complex and reflect the character of society's social structure. When racial conflict occurs, it indicates social stress and inequality between groups, especially when the minority realizes that they have been dominated and discriminated against by the majority. By definition, race refers to:

“...a category composed of people who share biologically transmitted traits that members of a society deem socially significant. People may classify each other into races based on physical characteristics such as skin color, facial features, hairs texture and body shape”

(Macionis & Plummer, 1997; p.323)

Unlike race, ethnic groups are socially defined based on cultural characteristics rather than physical attributes. Two people who share the same ethnic group would hold the same “we” feeling between group members. They are bound by a similar history, values, attitudes and behaviors (Ting, 1998; p.12). As with writers in early ethnicity schools such as Wellman (1977) and Hall (1992), ethnicity constructs boundaries between the “Self” and the “Other” and culture is critical in the formation of ethnic identity:

“Ethnicity refers generally to the perception of group differences and so to social boundaries between sections of the population. In this sense ethnic differences is the recognition of a contrast between ‘us’ and ‘them’.”

(Wellman, 1977; p.ix)

“The term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated and all knowledge is contextual.”

(Hall, 1992; p.257)

Race relations, according to social scientist Robert Park (1950) are a form of relationship that exists when two groups of people distinguished by descent meet each other. This is followed by stages of competition, accommodation, assimilation and amalgamation. Park asserts that integration between groups will form when race differences become less important.

J.S Furnivall (1939, 1948), a notable social scholar, refers to pluralism based on his empirical research in Burma (a former name of Myanmar) and Indonesia as societies which embrace ethnic segregation and conflicts under one political system. Furnivall (1948, p.311) characterized plural society as:

- a) A society with a mix of people from different groups but they do not unite.
- b) Every group has their own religion, culture, language and way of life.
- c) Differences in race and ethnic parallel with economic differences and this leads to unequal and stress between groups.

Ting Chew Peh (1998), a Malaysian scholar, suggests that Furnivall's theory of pluralism is suitable to be applied in the context of Malaysia. Ting indicates that the plurality of society in Malaysia is marked by characteristics such as cultures, physical segregation and ethnic group's identification based on occupation, which has led to less social contact between groups but did not produce significant conflict throughout the nation. However, changes in technology and replacements in human resources by machines, as he assumes, may bring a significant change to ethnic relations. Ting projects that integration may hardly be achievable in plural society and becomes more complex due to technological development, communications, economic and political progress.

4.4 Imagined Communities and Nationalism in Malaysia: Integration Discourse

Mahathir Mohamad, in his speech "Building a Malaysian Nation" at Putra World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur, on 1st August, 1988, says:

"However, when we attained independence we made an agreement to accept Malaysia as the official name of the country, a Malaysian nation as our nation and *Bahasa Malaysia* as our national language. All these terms originate from the name of the largest indigenous community in the country, namely the Malays. To accept Malaysia, to be called Malaysians and to use *Bahasa Malaysia* does not make us Malay."

The “Malaysian Nation” as mentioned in the above quote reflects the way the Malaysian Government moulds the nation into what they believe to be an ideal “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983, 1991). However, it is argued that the reality of cultural diversity, and more specifically, the presence of multiple local cultures, has been an obstacle that impedes progress along the development of national unity in the country.

The concept of an imagined community was originally addressed by Benedict Anderson in the early 1980s to describe a nation as a community which is socially constructed and imagined by people who perceive themselves as part of the group. In his book *Imagined Communities* (1983, 1991) Anderson defined a nation as an “imagined political community [that is] imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson, 1991; p.6). Unlike an actual community that is based on face-to-face interactions, members of an imagined community hold in their minds a mental image of similarity amongst each other. For instance, members feel a sense of nationhood with other members when their “imagined community” is involved in an important national event such as the Soccer World Cup or other international festivals. This means that the members of an imagined community will probably never know one another in reality; however, they may have similar interests or identities which bond them as part of the same nation. As Anderson (1991; p.6) puts it, a nation is imagined because;

“...the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”

A nation is an imagined community because “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson, 1991; p.7). Therefore, this feeling of “amity” that unites the people to sacrifice for their nation establishes strong nationalistic sentiments towards protecting their states and a willingness to die for their country.

An imagined community, following Anderson, could be seen as an ideal social group that is formed with a sense of oneness, freedom and uniqueness. In pre-independent Malaysia, an imagined community which was based on Malay-nationalism helped free the nation from the continuation of colonial domination. Malay

communities showed their strong ethnic nationalism when opposing the creation of Malayan Union by the British reign in 1945 (see Chapter 1 for details), which suggested the principle of equal rights for Chinese and Indian immigrants and other minorities. This led to the independence of the country and the development of modern Malaysia that continues to hold the power of ethnic Malays until today. However, tension and social issues which continue to threaten the stability of inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia are argued to be due to the strong influence of Malay nationalism in every socio-political aspect. The legacy of Malays and Malay-nationalism in the country through several affirmative policies suggests the practice of “ethnic nationalism” as introduced by Michael Ignatieff (1994).

Ignatieff expands Anderson’s idea of imagined communities by looking at how the power of nationalism may be used to retain self-determination. In describing the concept, Ignatieff divides the definition of nationalism into three different ideals. Firstly, nationalism can be accepted as a form of political doctrine where there is a mindset that people belong to a particular nation where they have the right of self-determination on their governance and the nation state. Secondly, nationalism as Ignatieff suggested, can be accepted as a cultural ideal where the nation is responsible for providing a sense of belonging across society regardless of identity differences and socio-cultural background. Thirdly, nationalism can be considered a moral ideal, as “an ethic of heroic sacrifice, justifying the use of violence in the defense of one’s nation against enemies, internal or external” (Ignatieff, 1994; p.4). However, what makes these ideas interesting is that they rely upon each other. For the moral claim, nations are able to defend their existence with violence, thus there must be a sense of belonging to that nation for security to be seen as important and legitimate (Ignatieff, 1994). Further, for a nation to be able to exercise the right of self-determination there must also be a cultural claim that the nation is able to satisfy these needs (Ignatieff, 1994).

Ignatieff further explains that such nationalism can arise through either “civic nationalism” or “ethnic nationalism”. Civic nationalism “maintains that the nation should be composed of all those – regardless of race, color, creed, gender, language or ethnicity – who subscribe to the nation’s political creed” (Ignatieff, 1994; pp.3-4). By this, Ignatieff means that nationalism is called civic due to its democratic character that offers equal rights to all citizens under one accepted system of political practice and

values. In contrast, ethnic nationalism as Ignatieff suggested is more characterized by an individual's inherited attachment to a nation rather than their chosen attachment.

“...the nation, its people, which created the state. What gave unity to the nation, what made it a home, a place of passionate attachment, was not the cold contrivance of shared rights, but the people's pre-existing ethnic characteristics; their language, religion, customs and traditions.”

(Ignatieff, 1994; p.3)

Malaysia is one example of how the ideology of ethnic nationalism was deployed in socio and political practices (see Chapter 1 for details). Although this may cause greater attachment to the nation, it is argued that ethnic nationalism is less pragmatic than the civic counterpart since only part of the society (the Malay group) gains their rights and succeeds in retaining their self-determination. As a plural country that is comprised of multi-ethnic communities, the special rights and privileges given only to ethnic Malays who claim to be the original people would cause difficulties in maintaining social cohesion amongst other ethnic minorities, especially Chinese and Indians in the country.

4.5 Ethnic Nationalism – Public Discourse

Since pre-independence, race-related issues that bloomed largely in terms of economic, social and political differences amongst three major ethnic groups in Malaysia (Malays, Chinese and Indians) inevitably deepened in post-independent. These three groups are varied in their value systems and traditions and also with respect to aspirations and expectations. As Malaysia's former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (cited in Isa, 2008; p.100) says: “the Malays wanted Malaya for the Malays while the Chinese demanded citizenship by right of birth”. Apart from that, the lack of bonding between the groups was due to the difference in socio-demographic background, which helped to separate the ethnic groups from one another. Ali (1975, p.23), a Malaysian historian, suggests:

“In terms of demographic distribution, it has been shown that while about four-fifths of the Malays are in the rural areas, over half of the

Chinese populations live in the town, with the majority of the Indians concentrated in the estates”.

Even though non-*Bumiputras* (especially Chinese and Indians) secured citizenship upon independence, they had to contend with the constitutionally enshrined special status of royal families, Malay as the national language and the special rights of the *Bumiputra* community. Furthermore, the Islamization of the state has resulted in non-Muslim communities, mostly the non-*Bumiputra* ethnic groups, “feeling threatened, alienated and defensive” (Rahim, 2001; p.9). The wide-ranging programs which seem to privilege only Malays and other *Bumiputra* communities, such as the introduction of the National Economic Policy (NEP) in 1977 (see details in Chapter 1), continue to be challenged by non-*Bumiputra* communities. For the non-Malays, such programs represent a markedly new direction in nation-building and have provided Malays with a meaning that extends beyond the cultural and political by venturing into economic spheres. A clear manifestation of the multi-pronged Chinese resistance to the NEP’s cultural policies which promote the national language *Bahasa Melayu* can be found in the dramatic increase in Chinese enrolments into independent primary and secondary Chinese schools.

Malaysia, as many observers agree, has always been in a state of “stable tension”, which means that even though society is dominated by many contradictions, Malaysians have managed to solve most of them through a continuous process of consensus-seeking negotiations. Instead of choosing street violence as a solution to settle their differences and conflicts, Malaysians remain more optimistic by ventilating their dissatisfaction in the realm of public discourse. As a result, public discourse on ethnic differences amongst Malaysians has become highly rational and has been handled with great sensitivity (Baharuddin, 2008; p.6). People of Malaysia prefer “tongue wagging” (Baharuddin, 2008; p.6) through traditional mass media platforms or more recent electronic media, such as the Internet, blogs and short message services (SMS).

After more than 50 years of independence Malaysia can stand tall among developing countries. Malaysian’s “can do” attitude as encapsulated in the “Malaysia Boleh” slogan characterizing the growing self-confidence of Malaysia and the people. Vast improvements have been made in terms of healthcare, education, employment, economic growth, per capita income, gender participation and rural development.

Malaysia's success in bringing down the poverty level from almost half of the population at the time of independence in 1957 to just over 5% in 2007 is a world record. However, having achieved much in the first five decades of its nationhood, the challenges of nation building remain (Yeoh, 2008).

4.6 Studies of Social Integration and National Unity in Malaysia

From a Western perspective, most research on social integration focuses on racial crises (Patterson, 1997), especially between “whites” and “blacks” in urban areas (Lynch, 1999; Foner, 1995; Englefield, 2005; Shinew, et al. 2004). In Malaysia, many integration studies were conducted within the context of ethnic differences and those of class and social inequalities (Klitgaard & Katz, 1983). Some turned their interests towards economic development and social stratification (Jesudason, 1989; Ahmad, 1990; Faaland, et al., 1991), while others concentrated on issues such as education (Selvaratnam, 1988) and the impact of the National Economic Policy (NEP) on inter-ethnic relations.

According to Cornell and Hartmann (1998), ethnicity serves as a principle of social allocation and it may represent a form of social solidarity. To say that ethnicity is a form of social allocation means that individuals are channeled into locations in the social structure based on their ethnic characteristics (Puay Liu, 2001). Numerous studies have provided rich analyses and ethnographic accounts of the notion of national unity (Osman, 1981; Atoma, 1988), nation building (Ishak, 1999) and national identity (Anuar, 1990; Wahab, 2002; Rahman, 2005). Ishak's (1999) study emphasizes the importance of national unity in Malaysia, which is regarded as a plural society. He stresses that a nation-building project in the context of constructing *Bangsa Malaysia* (a united Malaysian nation) was rather unsuccessful but remains a basic national agenda. By exploring the viability of the project, Ishak contends that the potent interplay between the forces of ethnicity and nationalism constitute the crux of the political stability and nation-building in the country. He argues that this stems from the prevalence of the varying perceptions of a “nation-of-intent” within and across ethnic groups. According to Ishak, these phenomena have not only shaped the pattern of ethnic political mobilization in the country, but above all, have placed the most complex set of

obstacles in the path of the project of nation-building. This study argues that the effort of constructing *Bangsa Malaysia*, therefore, could be seen as a significant attempt by the state to reconcile the varying ethnic ideologies of the nation-of-intent. With regard to the same issue, Yacob (2005, p.25) presents the proposition that “the nature of Malaysian society being multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-cultural as well as multi-religious, presents a considerable challenge to the task of successful nation building”.

Studies of class and ethnic relations in Malaysia document various levels of inter-ethnic integration (Osman, 1995; Lee, 2004) but do not refer to the way the impact differs according to communicative approaches. Among these studies, Omar (1990) refers to ethnic and class integration in rather spatial and socially segregated dimensions, meanwhile Bustami in his research conducted in 2003 claims that human workplaces could be a vital unit for societal information. By assessing ethnic integration among publically-listed companies in two major cities in Malaysia (Klang Valley and Penang), his research findings demonstrate that most of the corporations examined had a low degree of ethnic integration.

One of the few studies to examine the impact of ICT was conducted by Rahman (2005) who analyzed the applicability of Malaysia’s ICT policy and its consequences for both the economy and society. According to this study, the ICT policy did contribute to national economic growth, but one consequence of the high use of the Internet was a greater division within society. The research reveals that although some social divisions such as gender and ethnicity are narrowing in term of use of ICT, the culture gap is becoming wider. The findings imply that the widespread use of ICTs may contribute to the further establishment of social democracy, but increasing numbers of foreign nationals leads to issues such as cultural hybridization and cultural domination through the Internet by some ethnic groups, which can contribute to “neo-colonialism” in Malaysia. Rahman (2005) argues that this will challenge the Government’s efforts to create a robust Malaysian national identity.

A recent study conducted by Ibrahim et al. (2009) provides insights into the role of ICT on facilitating social capital. The study was carried out in rural areas where ICT-driven communities namely KedaiKom was implemented. The study examined social network particularly social participation (trust, reciprocity and sense of community).

The findings suggest that KedaiKom has successfully created a high level of social interaction and bridging ties among community members of various ethnic groups.

4.7 ICT and Social Integration Theories

In recent years, Malaysian scholars have become more aware of the role of media in integrating people. Some refer to television as a vital telecommunication tool for promoting a collective sense of national identity amongst citizens (Wahab, 2002). Others claim that reading materials such as books and writing publications have a significant impact on the construction of a national identity (Anuar, 1990). However, past research (in Malaysia) has not yet empirically tested the impact of on-line social networking on social integration among all ethnicities, not to mention how the impacts differ by ethnicity, class or gender.

Considering the impact of computer-mediated-communications (CMC) across Western society, various studies inform new ideas of reworking the concept of social integration. Even though the issue of inter-ethnic integration was indirectly discussed in many studies conducted, it has fostered a new dialogue among scholars as to whether these cyber subcultures can potentially transform the way we define social relationships (Calhoun, 1991) and social bonding (Oldenburg, 1989). Oldenburg (1989), for example, argues that on-line communities may fill a social need that has long been abandoned in modern societies, where the closeness and social bonding of *Gemeinschaft* have been replaced by the emotional disconnect of *Gesellschaft*. Following Oldenburg (1989), every individual's movements involve three basic environments. These are: where they work, where they live, and the place where they join with others for conviviality. The latter environment is often regarded as a place where a sense of community belonging is achieved and experienced. Cafes, barber shops, and pubs, as Oldenburg argued, once provided this environment but, in the age of shopping malls, drive-in fast food, shrinking public spaces and private residents, the need for such socialization is rather left unfulfilled. Modernity has established a culture in which the home and the workplace remain as the only two interactive spheres of existence (Oldenburg, 1989). Therefore, the spectacular growth of virtual spaces has not

surprisingly attracted millions of people throughout the world to become members of this new public sphere in order to re-create and re-establish this space as a third medium of conviviality.

Many writers suggest that on-line social interaction will eventually lead to social bonding (e.g., Cerulo, 1997; Purcell, 1997; Parks, 1996). Likewise, Jones (1995) shares the view that newsgroups, bulletin boards, and other forms of computer-mediated communication have sprung up out of the need to re-create this sense of community, where participants join and become involved with the purpose of re-establishing social bonds. Similarly, Park (1996), in his study of the members of 24 different newsgroups, found that more than 60% of his subjects said they had formed a personal relationship with someone they first contacted through a newsgroup. Parks and others (see Thomsen, 1996, for example), noted that these relationships build up over time and often are continued through the use of other communication channels (i.e., telephone, the postal service) and further lead to face-to-face encounters. In fact, length of time and degree of participation, not surprisingly, contribute to greater rates of relationship building (Park, 1996). Reid (1995) also suggests that the problems in relationship building such as trust and racial conflict posed by CMC are easily overcome. She explains that the social information required for relationship development can be obtained via computer-mediated interaction, but the process simply takes longer and requires slightly more effort on the part of the participants.

The field of sociological research is no longer concentrated on communities and their off-line relationships. Instead, the age of ICT has opened up wider opportunities to analyse a new dimension of human-computer interaction. Before the introduction of ICT, social integration approaches mainly referred to individual perceptions, social conditions and the role of certain institutions. American social psychologist Gordon Allport (1958) hypothesizes that contact between race groups would not necessarily make relationships better but may often make them even worse, depending on the circumstances in which contact takes place. Allport formulated the “contact hypothesis”, which suggests that prejudice will decrease if the contact involves two groups with equal status but, it tends to increase if contact occurs under conditions of inequality.

Three major theoretical approaches in sociology namely, symbolic interaction, functionalism, and conflict theory, offer an explanation of inter-ethnic relations and racism. Taking a symbolic interaction perspective, American sociologist Herbert Blumer (1965; p.135) explains that racial prejudice involves four factors:

- 1) A sense of superiority by the dominant group based on a belief in the laziness, immorality, stupidity, and lack of progressiveness of the subordinate group.
- (2) A belief that the subordinate group is intrinsically different – that is, they are “not of our kind”.
- (3) A feeling by members of the dominant group that their “superiority” entitles them to certain privileges, powers, and advantages in political decision making, employment, housing, education, money, sexual partners and the like.
- (4) A notion among the dominant group that the subordinate group wishes to take over their “privileges and advantages”. The dominant group sees the subordinate group as an out-group, as strangers, who are naturally inferior and a threat to the well being of those in power.

While the basis of this theory may refer to inter-ethnic relations which occur in an off-line context, it is argued that circumstances may be different in the virtual environment as people are free from physical judgement and identities. On-line community members remain anonymous until they meet each other face-to-face. Therefore, it is argued that the anonymity factor and a sense of belonging that exists in on-line connectivity would give new dimensions in looking at this theory.

On an individual level, not everyone in a dominant group is prejudiced, nor do all individuals in a disadvantaged group respond with prejudice. Robert Merton (in Cockerham, 1995), in his functionalist theory, proposes four alternate relationships between prejudice and discrimination, each of which he describes as a separate personality type. These are “the bigot, the timid bigot, the fair-weather liberal, and the all-weather liberal” (p.34). Merton describes “the bigot” as a character who has both sense of prejudice and discrimination. In contrast, “timid bigot” is prejudiced but does not discriminate, perhaps because he or she believes it is wrong or is afraid to act as such. The person who has “the fair-weather liberal” personality is not prejudiced yet; he or she tends to discriminate against others because it is the norm in his or her society or

group. For instance, a white homeowner who is generally not prejudiced may tend to steer away potential buyers or renters who come from different ethnic groups or social classes because of fear of neighbourhood reaction. “The all-weather liberal” is not prejudiced and does not discriminate.

Again, Merton’s theory was developed based on social observation that occurs in a real setting. In virtual circumstances, a member’s physical aspects may not play a significant role in determining people’s networks. Instead, on-line relations are dependent more on texting skill and messages that are being delivered. On-line communications exchange information, opinions and knowledge without an intervention of physical appearance. Following this, one may be required to explore whether on-line interaction can help to reduce elements of racism, prejudice and discrimination. However, it is argued that on-line communication may create a new form of prejudice and discrimination in terms of a knowledge gap, level of intellectuality and intelligence, since communication and relationship building are solely based on printed texts and message transactions.

Conflict theorists such as Robert Blauner (1964) view racism as a means by which the capitalist ruling class deliberately exploits racial minorities. Blauner’s theory is essentially an “internal colonialism” model which explains how white people, as the majority, exploit minorities within the same society. By this, the whites are claimed to be using a labour force of minorities to enrich themselves. In return, minorities do not receive a share of the profits but are simply paid low wages. By keeping minorities in low-paying jobs, the owners and managers of capitalist enterprises are able to restrict the wages of all workers and maintain a cheap supply of labour. If majority group workers demand higher wages, they can be replaced by other minority groups or persons who are willing to accept lower pay. Racism, to conflict theory, is therefore a mechanism that capitalists use to ensure high profits. Among the workers themselves, the competition for good jobs promotes racism as the majority racial group comes to perceive the minority group as a threat to its well-being and reacts with prejudice and discrimination. For example, racism intensified on the West Coast of the United States in the late nineteenth century when white Californians organized themselves to keep Chinese immigrants out of the country (Cockerham, 1995). They did this in order to prevent Chinese from taking jobs and keeping wages low because they were willing to

work cheaply. Conflict theory thus holds that racism exists primarily because it benefits the ruling socio-economic class.

By referring to Blauner's theory, it is argued that in today's information society, the determination of economic success lies more in the power of knowledge, intellectuality and technology capability rather than simply dynamic of labour supply. Therefore, Blauner's theory may no longer be suitable to explain integration issues in today's multi-racial societies. However, it is believed that the same forms of "capitalist" will exist across information societies in certain circumstances. In the context of today's network societies, people who have access to information are considered knowledgeable and those who are able to control technology will have priority in a knowledge-based economy. Therefore, these groups will be the new capitalists in the digital era. Accordingly, racism in on-line communities may no longer be associated with wages or salary issues but, it could exist in a brand new "superior-inferior" relationship through domination of knowledge and technology in the digital sphere.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored existing theories and related past research that is useful for this study and ways to interpret the findings. Three theoretical perspectives are adopted. These are: a network society, social capital and social integration theory. The network society helps to explore the dynamic and influence of the on-line networks on communities. The theoretical perspective of social capital is important in mapping the pattern of social relationships formed by on-line interaction and communication. Accordingly, this study examines whether on-line communities and on-line networks will either influence integration or disintegration among community members. Social integration theories set out critical explanations which help this new study examine the role of technology in creating more equitable relationships among ethnic groups. The way conventional theories of integration seek to define inter-ethnic integration off-line offers an understanding of new patterns of social integration that emerge on-line. The next chapter describes the research methods used to carry out the objectives of the study.

Chapter 5

RESEARCH METHODS

5.0 Introduction

The previous four chapters have identified a significant relationship between on-line social networking and the formation of social capital and social integration across on-line community members. This present research asks “whether the same outcome would materialize within the context of Malaysian heterogeneous society”. This chapter will detail the methodology design used to explore the ways in which the formation of on-line communities contributes to social capital and national unity in Malaysia. It includes an explanation of the research approach and selection of methods for data collection and analysis. To illustrate these, this chapter is divided into several parts. The first part addresses the methods used in the research. It covers an explanation of the main approach applied in this research of a case study that utilised a mixed methods design. The following parts are dedicated to the description of the research methods based on a revised “Analytical Generation” structure developed in the first part. Discussion on each step in the model will involve five important research aspects: (1) sample and sampling process, (2) question’s design, (3) piloting and testing, (4) data collection and recruitment and, (5) analysis of data. All aspects will be presented to offer in-depth explanations of what, how and why they were selected and carried out in this research.

5.1 Research Methodology – A Case Study with a Mixed Methods Approach

The present research used six on-line communities as a medium through which to explore how this new form of on-line social network can change the landscape of inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia. A total of 199 participants from different groups were involved; on-line community administrators (8), on-line members (162), Government representatives (2) and the general public (27) were investigated to provide the information necessary to understand how communities are formed and changed by the presence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Using a case study, the main aim of this research is “to explore whether on-line networks affect (enhance, reinforce or modify) the forms of social integration between on-line community members who differ in terms of ethnicity, class and gender”.

Given the exploratory dimension of the study, a case study can be seen as a preferred method for this research. According to social scientist Robert Yin (2009), a case study can be defined as:

“...an empirical inquiry that investigates

- a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within the real-life context, especially
- when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p.18).

Yin further suggests that the best situation to apply a case study method is when

“...a “how” and “why” questions is being asked about

- a contemporary set of events
- over which the investigator has little or no control” (p.13).

Stake (2000) suggests that case studies can prove invaluable in adding to understanding, extending experience and increasing conviction about a research subject. Also, it has been described as a useful approach that attributes causal relationships rather than just describing the situation when doing descriptive analysis (Gray, 2009). David E. Gray (2009), a methodological scholar, has claimed that much past research which utilised a case study as a research approach often used a qualitative method as the main way of data collection. Yin (2009) however, insists that the case study can

actually use both qualitative and quantitative approaches. According to Yin, a good case study tends to use multiple sources of evidence that helps to link research questions, data and analysis in order to produce a good report. Yin (2009) makes this clear in the second part of his technical definition of case studies as they relate to the issue of data collection and analysis strategies:

“The case study inquiry

- copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
- benefits from the prior development of theoretical prepositions to guide data collection and analysis” (p.18).

By taking into consideration what Yin proposed as such a better way to conduct a case study, I decided to pursue this research by employing mixed methods; a combination of qualitative and quantitative strategies with “multiple cases as a single case study”. Following an “Analytical Generalization” model by Yin (2009; p.57), I made my own revised model as shown in Figure 5.1. Whilst Yin’s original model proposed a strategy of conducting and writing each case study discretely, I decided to analyse data collection from all research samples simultaneously. I called this strategy “Analytic Generalization” for “Multiple Cases within a Single Study”. This model will be used as a foundation for explaining the research plan adopted and strategies that were used in this study.

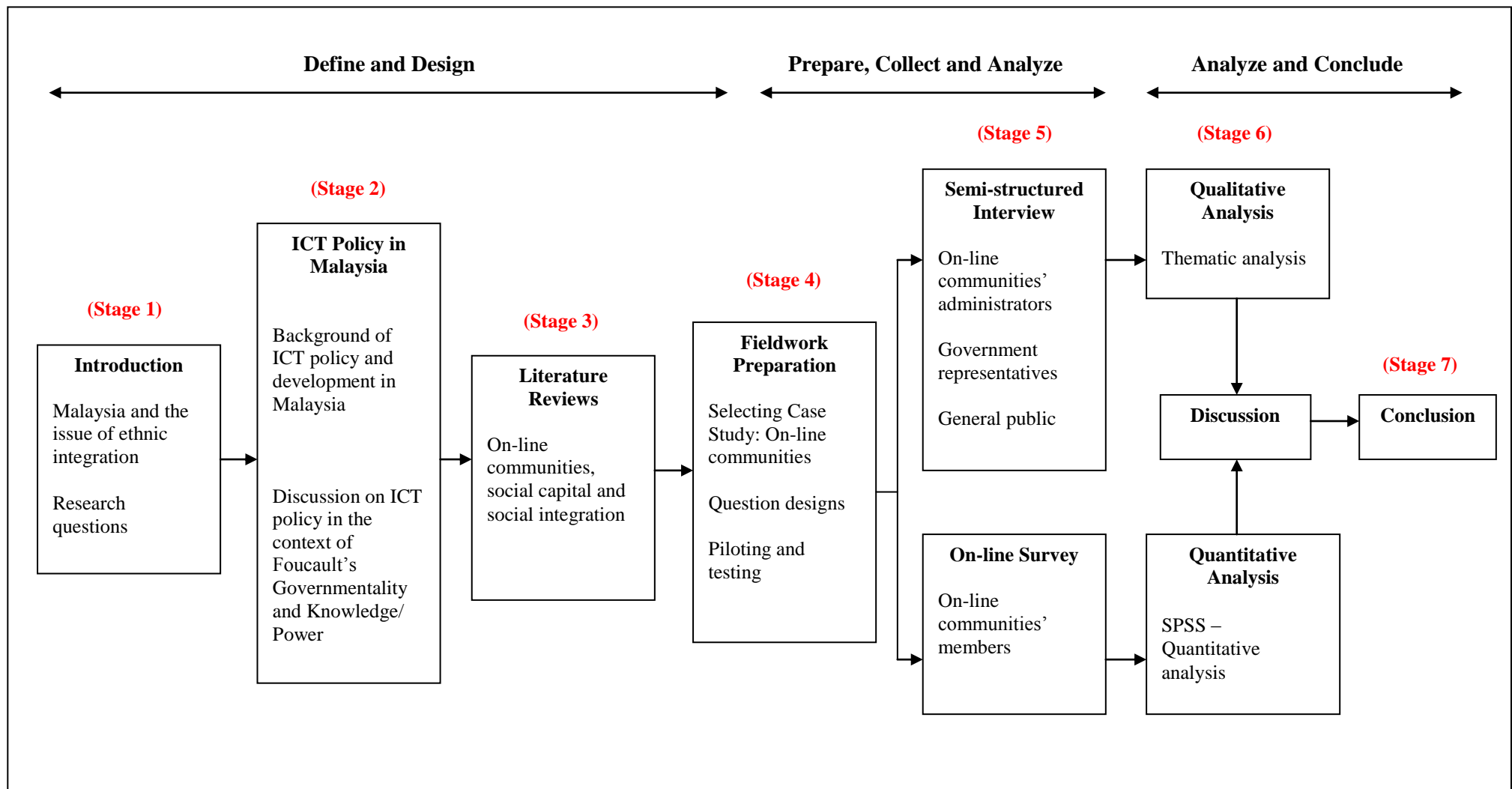


Figure 5.1: “Analytic Generalization” for “Multiple Cases within a Single Study”

5.2 Fieldwork Preparation (Stage 4)

A major objective of the fieldwork was to gather information that could provide descriptions of experiences, perceptions and views of those who are either directly or indirectly involved in the formation and development of on-line communities in Malaysia. Prior to the fieldwork planning and development, research issues and several relevant theories and concepts (as shown in three early stages in Figure 5.1) were presented and discussed (see Chapter 1 to 4 for details). These were brought together to create a framework to guide both the empirical and analytical aspects of the study. The theoretical framework was used to direct the fieldwork and to explain what was found in the empirical work.

5.2.1 Selecting a Case Study

The first on-line community in Malaysia is said to have begun around 1997, right after the formulation of the ICT policy. *Bangsar* on-line community was the first on-line community in Malaysia functioning as an alternative communication medium for *Bangsar*, a large and well-known neighbourhood in Kuala Lumpur. However, the *Bangsar* on-line community reportedly stopped functioning around 1998 due to lack of commitment by the members to maintaining and sustaining the website. *Bangsar* could be one of many other on-line communities that existed and vanished. The nature of on-line communities is that they are easy to create and thus may also easily disappear. This means that researching this kind of community is risky. The instability poses a difficulty when selecting the sample. Several steps were therefore used to select the sample for this research. They were:

1. Communities that are open for public membership, regardless of ethnicity, class and gender.

There are many communities that have rules governing who can join them. It might be a limitation of certain ages, genders, specific ethnic or religious groups, or it could be based on some unique interest depending on the purpose for the creation of the community. This research aims to explore socialization across a heterogeneous society

to identify social integration and social capital. Therefore, it is important to select on-line communities that are free from such regulation in order to maintain diversity of members.

2. Established on-line communities.

Finding an on-line community that is sustainable and active was not an easy task. However, this is crucial to ensure that the selected sample fits the research objective. Established on-line communities may present a developed, progressive, and new culture among members that will grow continuously within that community. These changes and achievements are of importance for the study in order to see whether the new culture created in an on-line medium affects the level or form of social integration and social capital as found within Malaysian off-line society.

3. On-line communities that have similar objectives such as integrating people, sharing knowledge and sharing common goals.

It is common for on-line communities to proclaim certain objectives and goals when formed. The aim normally functions as a guideline and introduction for all possible members, helping them to understand why the community was created. The research looked for on-line communities that have the specific goal of getting people together regardless of personal backgrounds and interest.

There was an initial plan to divide the research samples into two different categories: 1) those on-line communities which developed under the Demonstrator Application Grant Scheme (DAGS)¹ and, 2) on-line communities which were developed independently by the public. The rationale was to compare those with different creators to enable an analysis of the way that different strategies of creation influence the forms of social capital and social integration that resulted. More than 50 on-line communities existed under DAGS programmes and several established communities have been developed by independent parties. All on-line communities under DAGS were obtained through the DAGS website at www.dags.com.my. Public on-line communities were selected based on their popularity; with some noticeably

¹ Details about DAGS were discussed in Chapter 2.

more successful than others having received both national and international awards for various achievements. After selection, the first proposed set of samples was produced (see Table 5.1):

Table 5.1: List of Early Proposed Communities

DAGS On-line Communities	Public On-line Communities
E-Thalassaemia Rukun Tetangga Network (RTNet) E-Integrasi Networking Women E-Pekak FamilyPlace JuvaNet USJ 18 E-Neighbourhood Watch	USJ Subang Jaya (thereafter USJ) Puncak Jalil PJNet MalaysiaMAYA.com VirtualFriends.net Setia Alam Residential Association (SARA)

All the selected on-line communities shown in Table 5.1 were considered potential research sites based on the set criteria. However, during the second step of selection, I found various issues with several of them, mostly the on-line communities that were developed under the DAGS programmes. The on-line communities were inaccessible even though they still had valid website addresses. This was probably due to outdated websites or websites that were no longer active. Another problem was unexpectedly losing some of the on-line communities. These on-line communities were initially accessible but unfortunately disappeared soon after. There was also the case where some selected on-line communities did not actually reflect the research requirements – for example, were not really active, had less-membership and were unstable². Other on-line communities³ were unresponsive towards the research approach. This included cases where the community's administrator refused to allow their on-line communities to take part in the research. One community administrator, for instance, asked for compensation in return for studying the on-line community. As a result, this on-line community was removed from the list as this research does not have any allocation for such a request; participation is solely on a voluntary basis.

² Unstable here means the website is out of date and having regular access problems.

³ This means that the community's administrator was unresponsive to the research request.

After going through these various challenges, a set of six on-line communities was finally produced (see Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: The Six On-line Communities

DAGS On-line Communities	Public On-line Communities
FamilyPlace	USJ Subang Jaya PJNet MalaysiaMAYA.com VirtualFriends.net Setia Alam Residential Association (SARA)

As shown in the new list (Table 5.2), there was only one on-line community selected under the DAGS project, whilst the other five belonged to independent parties. Since the number in the sample was obviously unbalanced, the research plan was changed from comparing both categories to a general analysis of all samples under one broad category. The other reason for this was that FamilyPlace.com was no longer bonded to DAGS and the community had become independent. Instead of analysing all on-line communities based on different strategies of creation, the new research orientation aims to see the network effect and socialization amongst members of selected on-line communities. The function of DAGS as a funding provider may be one important aspect but the influence of this Government agency in such on-line communities may be less significant than originally thought.

5.2.2 Questions Design

There were four (4) sets of questions prepared for this research. Three sets of semi-structured interview questions were designed for three different groups of interviews, namely the on-line community administrators, the Government representatives and the general public. One set of questions was constructed for the purpose of the on-line survey with the members of the six selected on-line communities as target respondents. Details about questions and underlying objectives are as follows:

5.2.2.1 Semi-structured Interviews

1. The on-line community administrators

The first set of questions was designed for on-line community administrators. The main objective was to get in-depth overviews investigating why the on-line communities formed and their experiences of managing these new social groups. The specific objectives of the questions were:

- a) to obtain their awareness about Malaysia's ICT policy and whether the policy has had an influence on the decision to form the on-line communities;
- b) to examine why they decided to form the on-line communities and how they were started;
- c) to explore their experiences in conducting and managing the on-line communities, especially in the context of members' social relations on-line and off-line and,
- d) to obtain their views about the potential impact of on-line communities in the context of future social integration and national unity in Malaysia.

Based on these objectives, nine related questions were designed for the purpose of interviews with the on-line community administrators (see Appendix 5A for the full set of questions).

2. The Government representatives

The second set of questions was designed for a group of Government representatives. The interviews aimed to determine an initial idea of how the Government developed the policy and understood the purpose of the introduction of ICT policy in Malaysia. Thus, the interviews were:

- a) to examine why they decided to formulate the ICT policy;
- b) to obtain their views about the significance of ICT policy for economic development and society as a whole;

c) to examine why they encouraged the formulation of on-line communities in Malaysia and,

d) to obtain their views about the impact of on-line communities in the context of social relationships and national unity in Malaysia's plural society.

Based on these objectives, a total of eleven semi-structured questions were designed and asked in the interviews (see Appendix 5B for the full set of questions).

3. The general public

The third set of questions was formulated for interviews with a sample of the general public. The purpose of interviews with this group of people was to seek their opinion about on-line communities and what they thought the effect of such communities would be on the future of social relationships between ethnic groups in Malaysia. Other specific objectives to be explored through the interviews were:

a) to obtain their awareness about Malaysia's ICT policy;

b) to examine why they were not members of an on-line community;

c) to explore their experiences in social integration and relationship with other ethnic groups off-line and,

d) to obtain their personal views about the possible impact of social integration through on-line relationships and the future of on-line communities in the context of social integration and national unity in Malaysia.

All four objectives were used as a guideline to formulate seven questions for the interviews (see Appendix 5C for the full set of questions).

5.2.2.2 On-line Survey Questionnaire

An on-line survey was used as a method for collecting data from members of the six selected on-line communities. An on-line survey was chosen because it enabled quick and convenient access, allowing participants to complete and submit the survey at

a time most convenient to them. As the target participants came from on-line-based groups, it was thought to be the most suitable approach to a survey. The survey was constructed using on-line survey software “Survey Monkey” which can be obtained through the official website <http://www.surveymonkey.com/Default.aspx>. The decision to choose this software over others was because *SurveyMonkey* allows for comprehensive logics for both qualitative and quantitative questions. It also offers good management of data, provides initial analysis and spreadsheet downloads for further data mining (Thorns, et al., 2008). Hence the data can be organized and monitored easily and the website provides a convenient way to manage the survey at any time.

The survey was designed to provide quantitative, descriptive information through the use of multi-choice questions alongside open-ended questions. These were intended to generate qualitative, reflective and interpretive responses. The multi-choices questions were designed to construct a more comprehensive quantitative data set, which would enable the identification of some macro processes, whilst the qualitative open-ended questions were constructed to provide:

1. Contextual depth to the quantitative material,
2. Micro level insight into individual’s perceptions,
3. Feedback and critical evaluation of the experiences of the participants.

Most of the closed-ended questions used categorical types of question that produced both nominal and ordinal data. Chi (cited in Birbilli, 2000) suggests that a traditional “lifetree scales” questions were difficult to employ because degrees of agreement and disagreement may not be relevant to Asian culture. The categorical “Yes” or “No” questions and “Agree” or “Disagree” are considered the easiest for Asians to answer. However, these types of responses may not result in interval level data, thus limiting the range of quantitative analysis available. Therefore, the questionnaire blended closed-ended questions and open-ended question to gain in-depth information on views of on-line community members regarding their social networking and social integration experiences with other ethnic on-line members.

The questionnaire was divided into 5 major sections. The first section sought data about the respondent. This included initial demographic information such as gender,

age, occupation, education level and place of residence. Demographic characteristics are of importance in this research as participants are considered a “new group” across society. In addition, basic data about respondents may further help project trends for on-line communities in the future. The second section asked participants to give some information about their on-line activities and the third section asked about on-line community membership. These sections were designed to collect information about the mode of ICT penetration among participants alongside the factual information of the on-line community movement in Malaysia. No questions were provided for participants to reveal their respective on-line communities. Under ethical considerations, the participants have a right to remain anonymous and the research needs to respect their right by not relating any personal experience and activities performed by participants in the on-line community to which they belong.

The following sections required the participants to convey their experiences of the interactions, sharing information, express their opinions about social interaction on-line, share their perceptions, expectations, and potential for further use of the technology to integrate with each other. This section was considered the most important as it sought data about personal experiences of social interaction on-line. The last section assessed their knowledge about the country’s vision and the Malaysian ICT policy. This was to test their awareness of public policy and how it relates to their decision to utilize ICTs in everyday life as much as taking part as a member of an on-line community. The survey was designed to be completed in the region of 15 to 20 minutes (see Appendix 5D for on-line survey questionnaire).

5.2.3 Piloting and Testing

There is a sizeable Malaysian student population in Canterbury, New Zealand. To proceed with a pilot survey, the Malaysian Student Association was contacted and requested for assistance. The survey was administered to a total of 40 undergraduate and postgraduate students from two local universities in Christchurch, the University of Canterbury and Lincoln University. Students involved were selected to ensure a balanced proportion of ethnicities (Malay, Chinese and Indians). The students offered comments about the questionnaire and suggested ways in which the survey would be

more culturally sensitive to Malaysian respondents. The pilot tested survey questions were then modified where appropriate as a result of this feedback.

Preparation for the fieldwork took about four months to complete. Apart from the sampling process and question design, the overall plan had to go through an evaluation procedure from the Human Ethics Committee (HEC) University of Canterbury and the Malaysia Economic Planning Unit (EPU)⁴. The fieldwork commenced when approval was obtained from both parties. Both interviews and the on-line survey were done in Malaysia from August to November 2008.

5.3 Interviews and the On-line Survey (Stage 5)

5.3.1 Interviews: Research Participants and Process

As mentioned earlier, participants for semi-structured interviews were drawn from three main groups: the on-line community administrators, Government representatives and the general public.

1. The on-line community administrators

On-line community administrators who participated in this research were those who either founded, administrated or who managed, moderated or who were either involved directly or indirectly in the formation, managing or maintaining the selected on-line community's website. The list of administrators was identified right after the selection of the sample of on-line communities. An invitation letter was then sent through their respective e-mails as most of the communities' administrators placed only their e-mail addresses or links in the on-line communities' website (see Appendix 5E for a copy of an invitation letter). There were also on-line communities that only provided a link to anonymous administrators. In this case, those who replied and agreed to be interviewed were included. Below are the lists of the administrators who were finally included in the research:

⁴ EPU is a Malaysian government agency under the Prime Minister's department that is responsible for coordinating any research by international institutions before conducting the project in Malaysia. This is a part of the requirements for any thesis conducted in or about Malaysia.

Table 5.3: The Administrators of Six Selected On-line Communities

On-line Communities	Administrator(s)	Ethnic Origin
VirtualFriends.net	V1 (Webmaster, Administrator) V2 (Advisor)	Malay Malay
USJ	U1 (Administrator)	Chinese
FamilyPlace.com	F1 (Webmaster, Administrator) F2 (Webmaster, Administrator)	Chinese Chinese
PJNet	P1 (Administrator)	Eurasian
SARA	S1 (Webmaster, Administrator)	Chinese
MalaysiaMAYA.com	M1 (Webmaster, Administrator)	Malay

The first interview was held with V1⁵ and V2, a married couple from Kuala Lumpur who developed VirtualFriends.net together. V1 held the position of founder and webmaster while V2 acted as a community advisor⁶. F1 and F2 were in the second team. They were a husband and wife who formed and administered FamilyPlace.com. The other four participants were U1, a senior administrator of USJ; S1, a founder and administrator of SARA; P1, part of the administrative team of PJNet and M1, a founder and webmaster of MalaysiaMAYA.com.

The ethnicity of all the administrators who participated in this study was identified and provided a mix of different ethnic origins. Four of them were ethnic Chinese (F1, F2, U1 and S1), three were Malays (V1,V2 and M1) and one was Eurasian⁷ (M1). Although I felt a little bit disappointed at not having an Indian

⁵ All administrators have been given pseudonym identities to protect their privacies. Each alphabet used is to represent their respective on-line communities, i.e.: V for VirtualFriends.net, U for USJ, F for FamilyPlace.com, P for PJNet, M for MalaysiaMAYA.com and S for SARA.

⁶ Webmasters, advisors and administrators have the ability to add, edit or delete any content within the community and to modify or delete the access privileges of any members of the community. Webmasters and advisors are the highest in the hierarchy of an on-line community management team. An administrator or moderator is a member appointed by a webmaster or advisor. A moderator normally leads and monitors a forum thread and he/she has the ability to add, edit or delete content posted by members – Extract from VirtualFriends.net Rules and Regulations.

⁷ Eurasians do not form a single ethnic group, but are the descendants of various Asian peoples (Malays, Chinese, Indian, Bataks etc.) on one hand and “Europeans” (colonial powers such as the Portuguese, Dutch and British as well as migrants from Central and Eastern Europe) on the other. A distinct group of Eurasians are the descendants of the Luso-Malay or Kristang in Malacca (one of the Malaysian states) (Braga-Blake, 1992).

representative in the group, I am positive that the views and arguments from these people can still present a variety of different perspectives based on their diverse social backgrounds. Moreover, the arrangement does not imply that participants cannot offer views or suggestions of those outside their own ethnic groups. Rather, I see these interviews as providing an opportunity for the participants to be more dynamic in dealing with different facets of the issues involved since they have had wide experience while managing their on-line communities.

2. The Government representatives

Government representatives who were selected as research participants were those who either are, or were involved in the ICT policy making, or those who have or had played a primarily role in the development and overseeing of the ICT policy in Malaysia. They were mostly key members of the Government including Ministers or general administrators. The priority was given to those who are or were involved in the National Information Technology Council (NITC), and those involved directly or indirectly in formulating and running the DAGS program. Based on the selection criteria chosen for this group of participants, a first list of potential candidates was produced as below:

Table 5.4: List of Early Proposed Government Representative Candidates

Name	Position
Tun Mahathir Mohamad Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi Datuk Dr. Maximus Johnity Ongkili Dr. Raslan Ahmad ⁸ Tg. Datuk Dr. Mohd. Azzman Sharifuddieen	Malaysian former Prime Minister and Chairman of NITC 1996 Prime Minister of Malaysia (1994-98) Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation Under Secretary, ICT Policy Division, Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation A Permanent Secretary of NITC Secretariat

⁸ Dr. Raslan was also a key contact for DAGS.

All these selected participants were sent an invitation letter through their formal institutions or addresses (see Appendix 5F for a copy of invitation letter). E-mail and telephone conversations were used for further corresponding with the candidates. In the process of invitation I had difficulty in contacting and gaining cooperation from most of the selected participants. I was told that some of them were overseas, some had already changed department or had retired. Of the five proposed participants, only one agreed to be interviewed. He was Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia's fourth former Prime Minister and the Chairman of the NITC. Dr. Raslan Ahmad's position had been replaced by his assistant, Dr. Tan Yit Quin, who acted as a Principal Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, Malaysia (see Table 5.5).

Table 5.5: List of Participating Government Representatives

Name	Position
Tun Mahathir Mohamad Dr. Tan Yit Quin	Malaysian former Prime Minister and Chairman of NITC 1996 Principal Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, Malaysia

3. The general public

In this research, the term general public refers to those who were not members of any on-line community selected. Participation was voluntary and all participants were approached randomly from particular areas where on-line communities were executed. For example, USJ, PJNet and SARA are on-line communities that are based in residential areas. Target public participants, though, were obtained randomly from these respective locations. For the on-line communities that were not based in residential areas such as FamilyPlace.com, MalaysiaMAYA.com and VirtualFriends.net, members came from all over the country. Therefore, participants were randomly approached from five selected state capital cities, namely Kuantan, Pahang which represented the Eastern region; Johor Bharu, Johor representing the Southern region; Shah Alam, Selangor representing the Western region; Georgetown, Pulau Pinang representing the Northern

region; Kuching, Sarawak representing the East Malaysian region and Kuala Lumpur as a special area representing the central region⁹.

Even though the general participants were obtained randomly¹⁰, a balanced proportion of ethnic origins were ensured to provide different yet equal sources of views and information from various groups. For each area and state, I met three people from Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic backgrounds respectively. The total number of public participants in this research was 27, whereby nine participants each represented an ethnic group (see Table 5.6 for details).

Table 5.6: General Public Participants

On-line Communities	Area/State	Malay	Chinese	Indian	TOTAL
USJ	USJ Subang Jaya	1	1	1	3
SARA	Setia Alam	1	1	1	3
PJNet	Petaling Jaya	1	1	1	3
FamilyPlace.com MalaysiaMAYA.com VirtualFriends.Net	Kuantan	1	1	1	3
	Johor Bharu	1	1	1	3
	Shah Alam	1	1	1	3
	Kuala Lumpur	1	1	1	3
	Pulau Pinang	1	1	1	3
	Kuching				
TOTAL		9	9	9	27

Meeting with the Government representatives and on-line community administrators took place based on individual arrangements. Most of the meetings were set up according to convenient times and places¹¹ for participants. As for the public, these interviews were carried on weekends and public holidays when people tend to come out for shopping or spending time with families and friends.

⁹ The reason why I only went to these selected states was because of time limitations. As a Malaysian Government scholarship holder, I was given only 3 months to complete my fieldwork in Malaysia. There was also no extra funding allocated for conducting fieldwork.

¹⁰ Participants were obtained mostly in public areas such as the most populated shopping mall and public parks.

¹¹ Interviews with the Government representatives were held in their respective offices. With the on-line community administrators, the meetings mostly took place in public spaces such as the cafeteria at lunch time or after office hours.

Prior to the interviews, participants were informed of the interview details and procedures and access to the interview transcripts. The participants were provided with 3 sets of documents:

a) An Information Sheet

This document provides a description of the researcher's affiliation, outline of the research project and the purpose of the interview (see Appendix 5G for a copy of the Information Sheet).

b) A Consent Form

This document seeks permission to interview the participants using an audio-tape recorder and use the information provided for research purposes (see Appendix 5H for a copy of the consent form).

c) A letter of approval "On Conducting the Research in Malaysia" from the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), the Prime Minister's Department of Malaysia.

Interviews began after the participants signed their consent forms. Interviews were conducted in a very professional and academic manner in which the confidentiality and anonymity of participants was maintained according to the agreement made by both parties (the researcher and participants). The interviews were fully audio-taped with the permission of the informants. Fieldwork notes were recorded when necessary as part of the interview process. Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility for both researcher and participants to both ask and respond to the questions. Some questions were rearranged in order to engage informants' further responses. Yet, the consistency of the interview was maintained to ensure the accomplishment of the project's aim.

The interviews were conducted in both Malay and English. Most of the Malay participants, including Tun Mahathir Mohamad himself, preferred to speak Malay, admittedly the language of their mother tongue and widely used within this particular ethnic group. In contrast, participants from the Chinese and Indian ethnic groups chose to speak English rather than Malay. Some used a mixture of Malay and English during the interview, giving the sense that they could explain certain issues better in one or the other language. Most of the interviews took about 30 to 45 minutes to be completed.

5.3.2 On-line Survey: Research Participants and Process

Participants for on-line surveys were obtained from the members of the six selected on-line communities. Data from this participating group provided initial background information on the members along with their experiences since becoming members of an on-line society. Getting participation from this particular group was initially challenging. This was due to an anonymity factor which prevents non-members from having direct contact with on-line community members. Most of the community websites provide their own community act and regulations which means conducting a survey on community members is restricted without permission. The process of invitation thus took place at the same time as that of the interviews with the administrators. The community administrators were asked for permission to research their respective on-line community members (this is mentioned in the invitation letter for the on-line communities' administrators as in Appendix 5E). Once permission was given, by which the administrators were expected to fill out a consent form (this consent form is different from one handed out for the purpose of interviewing the administrators – see Attachment 5I for a copy), the survey was then placed on the on-line community website.¹²

The survey link for the members contains initial information about the researcher, as well as a brief but clear description about the nature of the research and the purpose of the survey. The invitation letter was designed to assure participant's anonymity. The approval letters from the EPU and UC Ethics Committee were not attached, but members were clearly informed in the letter regarding the guarantee of such approvals. Participants were not provided with a consent form for completing the survey but they were clearly advised that completion of the questionnaire implies consent to participate in the research (see Attachment 5J for a copy of invitation letter to on-line community members).

¹² Most of the administrators advised me to set up the on-line survey on the community's forum as they believed that it was the place where members were most likely to enter and actively exchange information. They then set up the survey link as a "sticky topic" to avoid it being overlapped by other upcoming topics posted by other members. Some other administrators helped distributing the on-line survey link to respective members' e-mails since such information was considered confidential and only community's administrators are able to access certain member's profiles and personal details.

As the commencement of the survey was subject to the permission given by the administrators, the time for survey distribution varied from one on-line community to another. The invitation letter containing the survey link was placed right after consent was granted by the administrators. The first survey link was located in the community forum in early September 2008 when the first interview with the first administrators was complete,¹³ whilst the last was placed in mid-October 2008. The survey stayed on the community website or participant's e-mail for about three to four months. It was officially closed for feedback in early January 2009.

5.4 Analysis of Data (Stage 6)

As there were two research approaches used in this research, the analysis of data also involved two different strategies; (a) Thematic analysis for qualitative interview data and (b) Statistical analysis for quantitative on-line survey data.

5.4.1 Thematic Analysis

The analysis of data commenced as soon as the fieldwork was completed¹⁴. Data analysis for interviews with the three participant groups (on-line community administrators, Government representatives and the general public) was performed using a thematic analysis method. By definition, thematic analysis can be referred to as:

“...a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic.”

(Braun & Clarke, 2006: p.79)

Thematic analysis was chosen because it is “a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006: p.78). The flexible nature of thematic analysis allows the researcher to determine themes (and prevalence) in a number of ways. However, based upon the

¹³ My first interview was with a founder of MalaysiaMAYA.com.

¹⁴ I concluded my fieldwork in Malaysia on November 2008.

research direction and needs, the analysis of data in this research has been done with particular considerations. As the research orientation tends to be more deductive (confirmatory) than inductive (developing a new theory), the themes or patterns within data were identified in a theoretical or deductive or “top down” way (Boyatzis, 1998; Heyes, 1997). In brief, a “theoretical” thematic analysis used in this research was driven by selected theoretical or analytic interest in the research areas which are; network societies, social integration, social capital and the concept of knowledge/power. Therefore, the nature of theoretical thematic analysis is more explicitly analyst-driven. Furthermore, this form of analysis tends to provide less of a rich description of the data overall, but a more detailed analysis of some aspects of the data, which are useful to help answer the main research questions.

As some of the interviews were conducted in Malay and mixed languages the process of managing data involved translating the manuscripts from Malay to English. As I translated, I referred to the translating process suggested by Birbili (2000) as a guide, especially in determining a better translation strategy to be adopted in the data analysis. Translation is described by Birbili (2000) as “transcribing the text of a source language into the target language” (p.25). It is more than just “changing the words” or as Simon (1996; p.137-138, cited in Temple, 2002; p.5) asserts:

“The solutions to many of the translator’s dilemmas are not to be found in dictionaries, but rather in an understanding the way language is tied to local realities, to literally forms and to changing identities. Translators must constantly make decisions about the cultural meaning which language carries, and evaluate the degree to which the two different worlds they inhabit are ‘the same’.”

There were two strategies involved in translating the interview data. According to Birbilli (2000), if the researcher managed to receive clear answers with coherent sentences from interviewee, he or she should translate the text “word for word”. However, if the construction of the sentences received from the interviewee is complicated, the researcher is suggested to summarize the data. The interview data I received from the fieldwork was mostly mixed in nature. Some were clearly delivered and some were not. Given a consideration that summarizing the text may lead to misinterpretation of the interviewee’s original thought, I decided to do a literal (word-

for-word) translation. However, to increase the readability and understanding of the reader, I made some structural changes and added missing fragments to the text (Birbili, 2000). This was to ensure that the quotes could be more easily understood by those who are not familiar with the context – in this particular sense, the culture of Malay language within the scope of English meaning and understanding.

The task of writing-up a thematic analysis was done mainly for the set of interview data with the on-line community administrators. The data from the interviews with the Government representatives and general public, even though they were carried out through the same analysis process, were not primarily analyzed and discussed in individual chapters. Instead, they have mainly been used as support data in the final discussion chapter (Chapter 8).

5.4.2 Quantitative Analysis

The initial steps of quantitative analysis involved the exploration of the *SurveyMonkey* platform to gain a broad overview of the general trends of the survey. Basically, the plan of analysis was constructed according to the themes that emerged in the analysis¹⁵ of semi-structured interviews with on-line community administrators. Once this was completed, the full set of responses was downloaded as a spreadsheet from *SurveyMonkey* for further analysis. Because *SurveyMonkey* only provides options for descriptive statistics and basic correlation, the data was imported to a statistical software package that offered more variation of statistical techniques (Valerie & Sue, 2007). For the purpose of this analysis, data gathered from *SurveyMonkey* was transferred to Statistical Package Social Science (SPSS) to make the data ready for a wide variety of analysis according to the initial plan.

By the time it was closed, the on-line survey had accumulated about 202 responses. Even though it shows a relatively weak percentage (only about 0.1%) compared to actual membership accumulated from all six on-line communities¹⁶, the number of responses was considered good enough for a new survey method conducting research in a newly-developing technological society such as Malaysia. According to

¹⁵ See findings and analysis in Chapter 6.

¹⁶ With regards to the previous analysis, there were about 200,000 members registered in all six selected on-line communities at the time it was observed as of end of March 2009.

Skitka & Sargis (2005) one of the disadvantages of on-line research is that “people are less likely to positively respond to invitations to participate in web than other kinds of research” (p.11). This statement could help to explain why this current research obtained less survey responses. It is argued that actual membership for an on-line community is not necessarily true as members are not physically bonded to the community as they are in their off-line communities. There might be members who were not actively involved in the community’s activities that may have registered once and then disappeared. Therefore, the decision to place the survey link on the website forum, as earlier mentioned, was seen as appropriate in order to approach only active on-line community members to take part in this study. Even though the number is relatively small, the quality of the responses is considered valuable for the research.

As for the 202 responses, only 162 or 80% of the data was used for the purpose of the analysis. The other 20% (or 40 responses) needed to be removed after the SPSS data screening process indicated that the particular entries (data) had more than 10% missing cases. This decision to eliminate particular survey responses was due to the missing data significantly reducing the value of analysis. According to Hair et al. (2007), keeping a sample where a majority of important variables have missing data can impact on the validity of the findings. For the data which had less than 10% missing values, the value of 99 was chosen as a code to indicate that the respondent did not enter an answer for that question (Coakes, 2005).

Analysis of the quantitative data involved both descriptive¹⁷ and inferential¹⁸ statistics. As for the statistical techniques (particularly inferential statistics), most of the analyses performed were basic correlation or cross-tabulations using appropriate non-parametric techniques such as the Chi-square Test and Hierarchical Loglinear Analysis. The reasons for choosing such statistical analyses were due to: 1) most of the data gathered are not normally distributed; 2) most of the questions designed are categorical; and 3) it is suitable for testing nominal data (unordered categories) such as gender, occupation or location (Valerie & Sue, 2007).

¹⁷ Descriptive statistics are used to describe the basic features of the data in a study. They provide summaries about the sample characteristics and responses to individual survey questions. Together with simple tables and charts, descriptive statistics form the basis for quantitative data analysis (Valerie & Sue, 2007; p.109)

¹⁸ Inferential statistics are used to make statements beyond the sample data (Valerie & Sue, 2007; p.109).

The qualitative sections (open-ended questions) presented the challenge of analyzing a large amount of semi-structured data. Past research (Thorns, et. al., 2008) has indicated that one suitable technique for making qualitative data more accessible for analysis is by applying text mining techniques using the Text-mining programme, TextSTAT¹⁹. However, I found that applying this programme was rather impractical and time consuming for this particular analysis. Since the key concepts or themes for this analysis were developed through previous thematic analysis, the process of identifying topics or issues arising from the comments made by the participants was easily managed in this current analysis. Therefore, the coding process and text-mining of the data in this analysis were performed manually. The initial sweep of the qualitative materials formed a preliminary level of analysis of the data, and created a broad brush outline of the existing themes accordingly. This enabled the clustering of similar notions and concepts expressed by the participants, although not always expressed in the same wording, but conveyed similar meaning that is beyond semantic similarities. The emerging clusters were used to further develop the Quantitative Content Analysis (QCA) phase of the qualitative analysis. QCA techniques were applied to structure the qualitative data around key themes. The initial themes were built through the design of the survey and also from the previous findings and additional ones were identified through the grounded work of the manual text mining process.

Both the findings from analyses of interview data and survey responses were combined to simultaneously discuss the issue of on-line networks, social capital and social integration based on the six selected on-line communities. At this stage, discussion was supported by analysis of data from the Government representatives and the general public to give a more comprehensive insight. All units for analysis selected in this research were seen as appropriate to combine to enable the research questions to be addressed. Even though the major analysis relied more on data collected from on-line community administrators and on-line members, this does not mean that the data from the Government representatives and general public were less important. Ideas, views and perspectives gathered from these participants contributed vital added value. It

¹⁹ TextSTAT is used to measure word frequencies and recognizes commonly used words or phrases for the purpose of identifying topics or issues arising from the comments made by the participants.

was hoped that by doing this a more insightful and holistic understanding of the subject studied would be gathered.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has described the main methodological framework and processes adopted in this research. The case study approach has been described and the key methods used to gather information have been discussed. This chapter ends the first part of this research. The chapters that follow concentrate on the analysis and findings of the research.

Chapter 6

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN SELECTED ON-LINE COMMUNITIES: AN EXPLORATION OF ADMINISTRATORS' VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES

6.0 Introduction

The present study explores where the growing trend of Internet community development fits into the context of Malaysian society and whether on-line communities can change the landscape of inter-ethnic integration. In order to do so, an investigation of key people related to the formation of on-line communities in Malaysia has been done, beginning with a series of interviews with on-line community administrators, Government representatives and the general public. This chapter will serve as the first part of the analysis. It explores the views and experiences of on-line community administrators taking place within their on-line communities. Analysis focuses on the ways in which the administrators see their on-line communities as contributing to social capital and social integration.

This chapter is divided into two sections; section one discusses background to the six selected on-line communities and, section two highlights outcomes and issues from the analysis. Section two is further divided into six parts and considers the six themes discovered throughout the analysis. Theme 1 discusses the nature of on-line networks,

social integration and social capital that was investigated in the case studies. Theme 2 focuses on the subjects of trust and negotiation that are the basis of social capital. Theme 3 narrows the discussion into the aspects of inter-ethnic relations in the six selected on-line communities. It then helps to evaluate several issues related to class differences and language use, culture and religious observation and, gender issues, which will be covered in Themes 4, 5 and 6 that follow.

6.1 The Six On-line Communities

There were six on-line communities involved in this study, namely, USJ Subang Jaya (thereafter USJ), PJNet, VirtualFriend.net, MalaysiaMAYA.com, Setia Alam Residential Association (SARA) and FamilyPlace.com. Each on-line community selected has different sets of attributes in terms of size, function and ethnic proportion among members, which are important and significant for this study.

6.1.1 VirtualFriends.net

“Malaysian virtual reality friendship world where all friends are engaged in activities even through separated by distance, space and time. Doesn’t really matter who you are...where you’re from, how you look like...as long as you’re sincere.”

The above quote, which has been placed on the VirtualFriend.net website, represents a true aspiration of the on-line community towards being a social networking site. Formed by a Malay couple (V1 and V2), VirtualFriends.net acts as an interactive medium that allows a group of people to communicate and exchange information about a wide range of issues over the Internet.

Formerly known as Community Zero when it was first developed in 1998, the website only attracted 20 people to become registered members. Since the community name was changed to VirtualFriends.net its popularity was boosted with many community success stories placed in popular teenage magazines and local newspapers. VirtualFriends.net has the largest number of members among those in this study. By the

end of March 2009¹, the total number of registered members stated on this community website was 125,405 (VirtualFriends.net, 2009). The number is expected to grow as this on-line community predominantly functions as a social networking community and this site is very popular among Malays, who represent the largest ethnic group in Malaysia. As well as this, the community has registered members who come from other countries, mostly from Asian neighbours such as Singapore, Indonesia and Brunei. Since it was established in 2001, VirtualFriends.net has continued to attract Malays to the community. Even though this community welcomes all kinds of people to become members, only a very small percentage of ethnic Chinese, Indians and other ethnicities participated.

6.1.2 USJ Subang Jaya

USJ Subang Jaya is a residential area situated in Subang Jaya, a suburb of Kuala Lumpur. The Subang Jaya community and its e-community portal have had a brief but eventful history. The portal, named USJ.com.my, was founded on October 26, 1999 by a resident called Jeff Ooi (USJ Subang Jaya, 2008). It acts as a community forum and boasts close to 3,500 discussion threads and some 3,000 posts within those threads. Unlike other on-line community projects which are mostly developed under the Government grant DAGS, this portal is a project funded and managed by residents of USJ Subang Jaya itself. Without any material support from the Government, the portal still claims success in fostering grassroots democracy, community-building and better local governance.

The project arose out of the gulf between the high expectations of new USJ Subang Jaya residents, prior to moving into this award-winning “model township” and the daily realities of traffic jams, clogged drains, unsafe playgrounds and frequent burglaries. The project founders felt that poor local governance and a chronic democratic deficit (local authorities in Malaysia are unelected) were at the root of the countless “mundane” problems besetting the township. Briefly, the project aimed to:

¹ Following estimations will be based on the same date.

- i) provide township residents with an electronic “community hall”;
- ii) foster grassroots democracy, including freedom of speech;
- iii) promote an ICT and knowledge-based society; and
- iv) be the engine of SJ2000, a federal government “smart township” initiative.

(USJ Subang Jaya, 2008)

Although the project was primarily aimed at residents of Subang Jaya, it also envisaged assisting the creation of tri-sectoral partnership between residents, the local authorities and the private sector known as SJ2005. The project was designed by the portal administrator (a USJ resident) to grow “organically” and from the bottom-up. Although lacking a time-frame, the project was conceived by its founders in 1999 as the engine that would drive SJ2005, a Malaysian federal Government project aimed at transforming Subang Jaya into an ICT-based “smart-township” by the year 2005. Subang Jaya was to be Malaysia’s test-bed for ICT-driven effective local governance (U1, 2008).

So far, the portal has achieved three of its four main aims as outlined above. First, it provided residents with an electronic “community hall” of an extraordinary vibrancy and popularity at <http://usj.com.my>. The on-line forum has become the prime public forum in this township of 500,000 on questions of local governance, community services and lifestyles. The flexible system of user-initiated “threads” (topic of discussion) allows for a dynamic “bazaar” of ideas and information on a vast range of local issues. As of 28th January 2005, the portal boasted 4,847 members and its forum had generated 3,055 threads and 32,963 posts in just over five years (USJ Subang Jaya, 2008). The record for the largest number of users on-line at any one time was set on 8th January 2005 at 532 people. Participants have literally woven a sense of community out of a myriad of intertwined threads.

Second, the portal has fostered grassroots democracy by not only allowing residents a “voice”, but also in a number of cases by setting the local governance agenda. One example was the portal’s key role in an October 2004 demonstration demanding the construction of a police station. The campaign, which was amply covered by Malaysia’s mainstream media, successfully blocked the building of a food court and led the federal authorities to commit themselves to the building of a police

station instead. Third, the portal has promoted an ICT and knowledge-based society by tangibly demonstrating the potential social and political benefits of new digital technologies to residents, municipal council staff, politicians and ICT policy-makers. For its excellent achievements throughout the years USJ Subang Jaya on-line community has received two coveted awards for “Best Community Development Website” in 2002 bestowed by PIKOM and “Malaysia Internet Awards” in the same year (USJ Subang Jaya, 2008).

With total members at 26,350, this community is as a sizeable population among the group of residential-based on-line communities in this study. 95% of the members of this community are believed to be Malaysian and most come from surrounding areas of Subang Jaya/USJ and Klang Valley². The remaining 5% indicate they originally came from various other countries all over the world. Ethnic proportions in this on-line community are not easy to estimate though, because there is no data included on the profile of the registrants. However, the ratio could reflect ethnic dispersion of the Klang Valley and the residents of USJ Subang Jaya itself, which has an estimated 70% Chinese population. There are quite a number of Malays and Indians registered as members and they are visible mainly through their participation in the community forum. The existence of these groups can also be seen by their respective e-mail addresses.³

6.1.3 PJNet

Petaling Jaya Net or PJNet is a non-profit community website developed and maintained voluntarily by a group of dedicated Petaling Jaya (PJ) residents (PJians) (P1, 2008). Formed officially in the year 2004, the community has approximately 19,000 registered members to date (PJNet, 2009). The objective of this website is to establish a cyber community network among the locals through the net by encouraging PJians to go on-line, to become a one stop information centre about PJ as well as to promote PJ to the world. PJNet contains the latest PJ news, useful articles, interesting

² Klang Valley is the area in central Selangor, Malaysia, comprising Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital city. The conurbation has a population of over 6 million and is the heartland of Malaysia's industry and commerce.

³ This information was given by the USJ on-line community's administrator, U1.

photos, surveys, even calendars and basically just anything about PJ, be it social, entertainment, Government or business related.

Developing as an on-line community with a goal of establishing a community network among the local PJ residents and outsiders, this community welcomes everyone to join and share their experiences and knowledge. Members are believed to come primarily from around the Klang Valley, particularly the PJ area (70%), outside Selangor⁴ state (20%) and overseas (5%). Precise numbers of ethnic proportions in this community are unknown but it can be estimated that more than 50% are Chinese, followed by Malays (30%), Indians (8%) and others (2%) based on their vocal participation in issues raised in the community forum.⁵

6.1.4 FamilyPlace.com

FamilyPlace.com is among the earliest of the on-line communities to exist in Malaysia. It was founded by a motivated Malaysian Chinese couple, V1 (a businessman) and V2 (a part-time musician and writer) who are enthusiasts in seeking new ideas about parenting (FamilyPlace.com, 2008). Having two daughters and a son, the couple wondered about how different they would be from their parents in bringing up their children. Struggling to look for new values that had never been exposed to them before, the couple decided to embark on a project to create a platform whereby parents all over the world can express and share their thoughts and ideas on parenting. This idea culminated in the creation of FamilyPlace.com in 1997.

FamilyPlace.com officially started on February 18th 1998 (V1 & V2, 2008) when the first community website was set up. Promoting a tagline “bridge families and build communities” (FamilyPlace.com, 2008), FamilyPlace.com set a vision of creating a caring community through developing functional families. Generally, the on-line community was created with a mission to provide parent-centred resources in education and community development. Through the website www.familyplace.com.my, articles, discussions and news about education and family issues from local and overseas

⁴ PJ is one of the provinces of Klang Valley and is situated in the state of Selangor.

⁵ Percentage of members was estimated by the community’s administrator, P1.

sources are presented and discussed. FamilyPlace.com info-sheets are printed and distributed quarterly to members as well as non-members as another platform to discuss or highlight educational issues and present new ideas in education today.

FamilyPlace.com obtained the DAGS grant from the National Information Technology Council (NITC) in 1999–2000 to expand its network through their website and other outreach programmes. It gets about a million hits a month and has about 1000 members (*The Sun*, 2002). FamilyPlace.com has gained popularity ever since and has attracted many people interested in becoming registered members. In the year 2002, the number of members reached a total of 10,000 (FamilyPlace.com, 1998) and the number is approximately twice as high to date. Since this community provides specific information for the purpose of development, namely the broad issue of parenting and children, it successfully gathered membership not only from all over Malaysia, but also from other parts of the world such as European countries and the United States. Ethnic composition in this on-line community is relatively equal and not limited only to the three major groups of Malays, Chinese and Indians. Also, members are said to come from other minority groups such as Kadazans, Ibanese and Dayaks who were originally from East Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak.

FamilyPlace.com has evolved its focus on education in line with the country's vision towards creating a knowledge society (K-Society) of life-long learners. Along with encouraging parents and children to use ICTs and hands-on-learning as a tool for learning and empowerment, FamilyPlace.com offers support to families facing problems in educating their children through a network of home-educating families. FamilyPlace.com now hosts a Malaysian Home Schooling website where the founders initiated the first Home Schoolers networks in Malaysia.

6.1.5 MalaysiaMAYA.com

MalaysiaMAYA.com is the youngest on-line community in the group. Born in July 2007, this website was purposely created to enhance on-line social networking among members. The overall function and features of this community are notably similar to the “Friendster” on-line community, a well-known on-line social networking website popular worldwide, which functions to connect people through their personal

networks. For the last two years since it was created, this on-line community has grown to a total of 6500 registered members (MalaysiaMAYA.com, 2009). As members are allowed to state their gender and location status, the statistics of the following two social components were easily obtained. The latest data for gender proportion for this community are 1431 for female members and 4221 for males (MalaysiaMAYA.com, 2009). The difference of 848 from the total number of members are assumed to be missing data, presumably due to the reason that some members were not willing to reveal their gender. Even though this community is owned and created in Malaysia, the ratio of members' locations shows almost equal percentages between the locals and outsiders. Data accumulated from the community website demonstrated that 58.1% of the registered members were from Malaysia whilst the other 41.9% came from other countries, largely from Indonesia, Singapore, the United States and Europe (MalaysiaMAYA.com, 2009). The percentage of members with a local ethnic background in this community is hard to identify, but from the visual personal photos provided, it can be estimated that they were a mixture, with the largest group being Malays followed by Chinese, Indians and other minorities.

6.1.6 SARA

The group with the smallest membership amongst the selected sample of on-line communities in this study was Setia Alam Residential Association or SARA. This is mainly due to its status as a new township and residential area; this community is mainly concerned with developing its stability across members. Started in 2006, when most of the residents were still waiting to move in, the community firstly served as a platform for the “soon-to-be residents” to get together and share and discuss issues regarding the township. It later became a virtual meeting place for residents and has sustained its position among Setia Alam neighbourhood until today. The latest number of total members is stated as being 1531 (SARA, 2009) where 60% of them are presumed to be residents of Setia Alam itself. The 35% from other parts of Malaysia have perhaps just joined the community to find out more about the township or to read information placed or discussed on the community website. The other 5% are overseas members who primarily consist of the house owners of Setia Alam working out of the country, together with other foreign members, mainly from Korea, China and France.

The local ethnic proportion for the community is considered to be 50% Chinese, 30% Malays and 20% Indians, based on their appearance in website forums and issues discussed that normally reflect their respective ethnic backgrounds.⁶

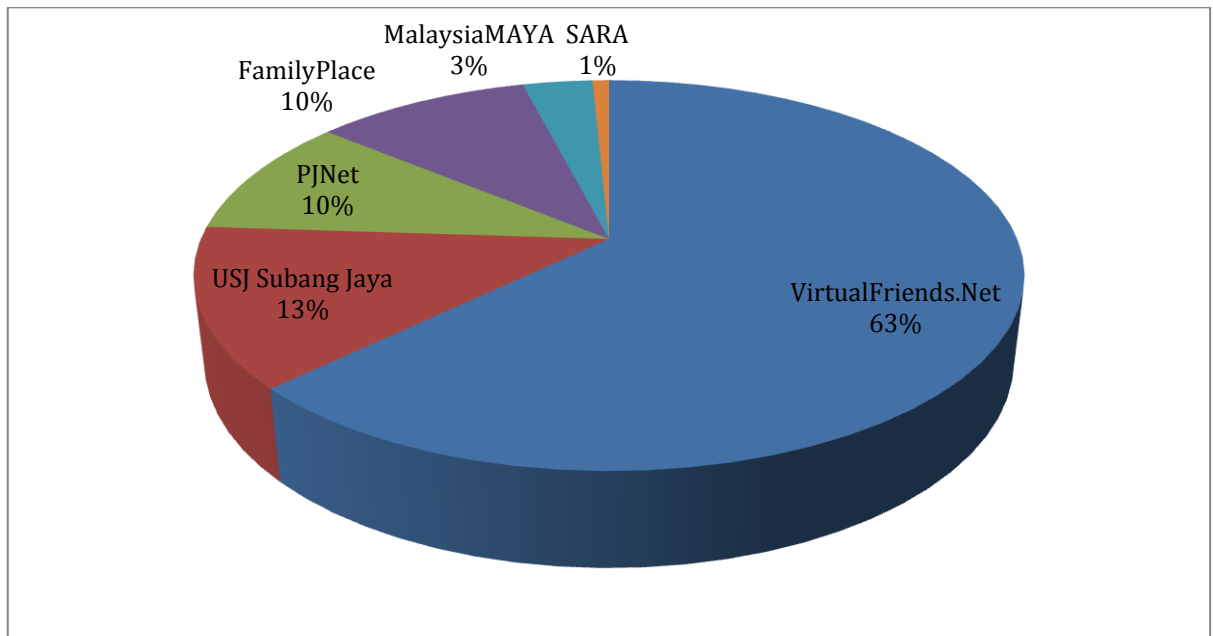


Figure 6.1: The Proportions of Members in the Study from the Six Selected On-line Communities

A distinctive attribute presented by the six on-line communities, which has sparked my interest, is their attitudes to other community members and more importantly how this new way of interacting will shape patterns of integration and social capital across diverse ethnicities, class, gender and regions that have long been discussed in Malaysia. Is the existence of on-line communities having a significant impact on social relations and community practices across society? The question has brought me to meet up with the administrators of the communities with the intention to hear their perceptions on this matter⁷.

As an administrator, the participants may play the same role that a traditional community leader would perform. Holding an executive position in the community requires them to be responsible for the whole of the community, to be alert and to always be responsive and sensitive to any current issues. However, being an on-line

⁶ Information and estimation figures have been contributed by SARA's administrator, S1.

⁷ See Chapter 5 for details about the administrators.

community administrator is quite unique because everything must be done virtually. Carrying out a task without physical connections with other community members requires them to always be thinking of how to best use their communication skills. In brief, the on-line community administrators that are involved in this research are responsible for most of the community management duties, including handling new registrations and monitoring the activity of all members. They are also in charge of notifying the members of any news related to the communities and updating the community website regularly. Despite managing mostly virtual activities, the administrators are also responsible for making sure the hardware components of the community website such as servers, hosting and other technical things run properly to best serve the community.

With some of the administrators having as many as 10 years experience in administrating on-line communities, their contact with community social issues could be interpreted by the topics discussed. The interviews generated various responses according to the subjects focused on. The central issues that came out from the data analysis can be grouped into six general themes as follows: (1) On-line social networks, social integration and social capital; (2) Trust and negotiation (3) Inter-ethnic interaction on-line and off-line; (4) Class differences and language use; (5) Culture and religion and (6) Gender issues.

6.2 Theme # 1: On-line Social Networks, Social Integration and Social Capital

On-line communities have been around since the 1980s, starting in North America, and are now a global phenomenon (Livermore & Setzekorn, 2009). In Malaysia, on-line communities have grown tremendously over time with Government support. The six on-line communities selected in this study are amongst the well established, with continuing sustainability as alternative communities in Malaysia. The existence of these communities is influenced by the advantages of the social networking industry that primarily provides opportunities for people to exchange ideas, knowledge and meet each other more efficiently than through chance face-to-face meetings.

6.2.1 Networking and Integration

The six selected on-line communities in the current study fall into two different categories, which affect their networking function and the activities performed. MalaysiaMAYA.com and VirtualFriends.net are on-line communities that have been formed for on-line social networking. These communities are identified as “Social Networking Sites” (SNS) (Gangadharbatla, 2009), similar to other electronic social networking platforms such as Facebook, Friendsters and MySpace⁸ (to name a few). USJ, PJNet and SARA, on the other hand, function as residential-based on-line communities. This type of community is known as a “place-based” community, encompassing a character with a “more traditional sense of a physically based community that has their added electronic resources for citizens” (Blanchard & Horan, 2000; p.7). In this on-line community, members can thereby develop their own electronic bulletin boards, a section for forum meetings and any information that relates to their physical area. What makes it different is that rather than having a face-to-face meeting with other local community members, activities and discussions about their living area can be done in a virtual medium. The third category is a community of interest. For this type of community, members’ participation is based on shared interests and not shared locations. This is the case with FamilyPlace.com as the community was developed based on the particular interests of parenting and children.

⁸ The predecessors of such on-line communities are Bulletin Boards, user and discussion groups and also multi user dungeons (MUDs) (Gangadharbatla, 2009).

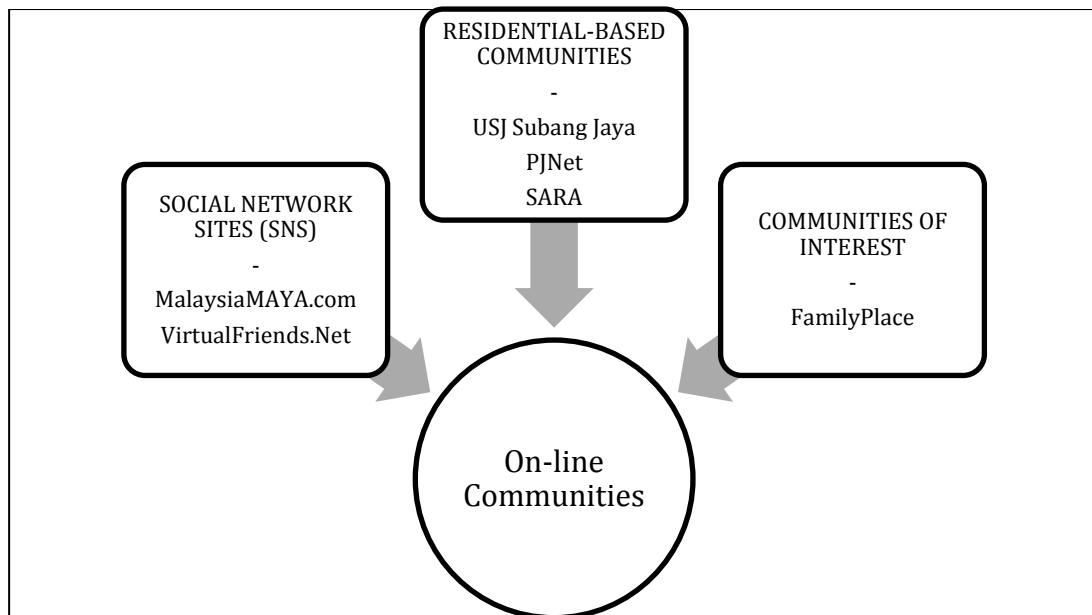


Figure 6.2: Types of On-line Community

As with other existing on-line communities, the selected communities also focus on building and verifying social networks among members. However, due to the nature of each community, the way social networking takes place in each community varies from one to another. Networking in SNS communities such as MalaysiaMAYA.com and VirtualFriends.net, for instance, is observably based on several factors which, in general, differentiate the way these communities function to connect people. The factors include: (1) the individual and his or her profile information, (2) the people that the individual is connected to, (3) the groups that he or she is part of, and (4) the explicit representation of relationships. These factors determine the individual's role, involvement and usage of SNS in making connections with other members in the community. In other words, the emphasis of on-line communities like SNS is particularly on the users or members and his or her individual network of friends. This means that members of MalaysiaMAYA.com and VirtualFriends.net are free to choose who they want to connect to and at the same time to refuse or ignore invitations from members they are not interested in including in their network circle.

For the other four on-line communities: USJ, SARA, PJNet and FamilyPlace.com; networking among members is rather indirect, and occurs spontaneously through public discussion and depends more on the communality that underlies the very existence of such communities. Personal information about members

is usually confidential or simply does not exist on-line because members were not required to give it. Under these circumstances, networking or connections between members is purely dependent on the content generated. For example, members from residential-based on-line communities such as USJ, SARA and PJNet communicate, interact and integrate through issues posted on the community web that might affect or relate to them as residents. For a community of interest like FamilyPlace.com, connections are made easily as people purposely join the community to associate with the others who share the same interests, goals or concerns as they do. In the case of FamilyPlace.com, for instance, members who participate are keen to discuss various issues related to family matters, children, education and other similar domestic problems.

Regardless of the type of on-line community, a free flow offered by the unique nature of virtual networking could open up a wider opportunity for social interaction and integration between individuals and the groups they participate in. It is also true in these six selected on-line communities that potential for members' integration is discovered through various constructed activities and agendas. The on-line community websites have been designed with many useful features in order to initiate members' relationships more efficiently. For example, SNS on-line communities such as VirtualFriends.net and MalaysiaMAYA.com provide more additional information about members than other kinds of communities. This information is normally based on personal characteristics, value-sharing and hobbies. In such communities, members voluntarily provide information about their preference in movies, books, television shows, radio stations, political leanings etc. The sites also allow members to reveal demographic characteristics in terms of income levels, location, education and work information. Other kinds of information (usually captured and often displayed on members' profiles) include contact information such as phone numbers, e-mail addresses, instant message identities and personal information such as relationship status, sexuality, favourite activities, quotes, photos, conversations with friends, groups members belong to and discussions members are taking part in. These characteristics act as a stimulus factor in the process of connecting people who seek friendships that possess certain traits or values they are looking for.

In spite of special characteristics that facilitate on-line communities such as SNS, all the on-line communities provide a space for public discussion, usually known as a “website forum”. For on-line communities other than MalaysiaMAYA.com and VirtualFriends.net, the forum serves as a central place where members spend most of their time taking part in a virtual communication with other members or just visiting the site to search for the information they need. The community forum provides lists of topics which are related to the purpose of the created community, or simply offer general information. Basically, the forum provides links to common community subjects, for example; ‘posting articles’, ‘clubs’, ‘music and video sharing’, ‘general talks’, ‘classifieds’ and ‘happenings and events’. Following Putnam’s social networking idea, under these topics there are many related mini-titles, called ‘thread/s’, posted by members to intentionally discuss a certain subject, or just paste up information for others. Examples of the forum details can be found in two selected on-line community web forums⁹ as shown in Figures 6.3 and 6.4 below. The threads are actually located under the main topics as listed and an example of the threads can be found in Figure 6.5.

⁹ Print screens of PJNet and VirtualFriends.net on-line communities have been obtained from the original website. Additional information provided was extracted and has been modified from the same web-pages.

Malaysia Forums Malaysia PJNet - Windows Internet Explorer

http://www.pjnet.com.my/forums.html

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Malaysia Forums Malaysia PJNet

PJNet Come as guests, stay as family.

Ads by Google Apartment KL Condo Penang Map Houses

SHIRE

PJ Sections > PJ News > Gallery > Forums > Classmates > Yellow Pages > Account

Welcome peony! [My Profile | My Classmates | Private Messages | Member List | Logout]

Petaling Jaya Malaysia Forums

You last visited on Sun Apr 19, 2009 12:54 pm
The time now is Thu Jun 18, 2009 12:54 pm
PJNet Forum Index

View posts since last visit
View your posts
View unanswered posts

Petaling Jaya Talk

Forum	Topics	Posts	Last Post
PJ Talk General discussion about Petaling Jaya.	1129	18687	Thu Jun 18, 2009 11:35 am jusco
PJ Friends Introduce yourself here and make new friends!	613	13911	Thu Jun 18, 2009 11:36 am jusco
PJ Events & Gathering Post here to organise an event, gathering, meetup or party.	201	8920	Thu Jun 18, 2009 10:32 am jusco
Malaysia Property Discussion on Malaysia properties, landed houses, condominium and shophots. Strictly NO Ads here or it will be deleted.	78	682	Thu Jun 18, 2009 11:51 am jusco

Start Chapter 8 - Draft2.doc Document2 - Microsoft Malaysia Forums Mal... My Pictures 5:17 p.m.

PJ Talks

- PJ Talks
- PJ Friends
- PJ Events and Gathering
- PJ Property
- PJ Adults Talk
- Topic of the Month

Malaysia Forums Malaysia PJNet - Windows Internet Explorer

http://www.pjnet.com.my/forums.html

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Malaysia Forums Malaysia PJNet

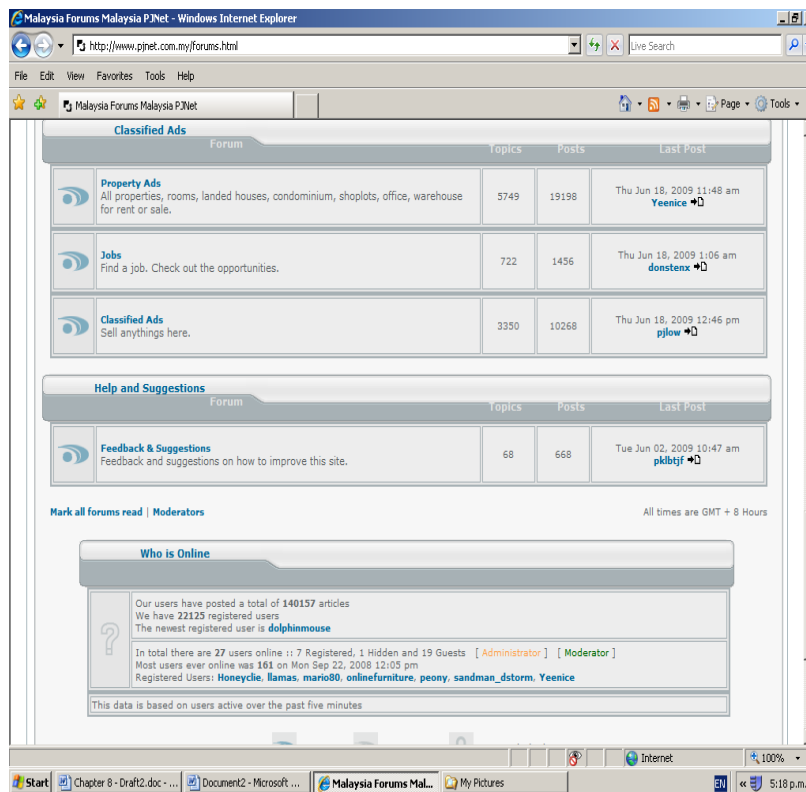
General Talk

Forum	Topics	Posts	Last Post
Academic Concerns Discuss your experiences with local or overseas university programs and courses.	20	59	Thu Jun 11, 2009 3:37 pm redwine2
Business & Investment Discussion on business & investment, strictly NO Ads here.	454	4592	Thu Jun 18, 2009 11:39 am Jebatfx
Computer, Internet, Mobile Phone & Electronics Discuss about computers & Internet. Including mobile phones, home appliances & other gadgets.	480	2214	Thu Jun 18, 2009 10:56 am jusco
Girls talk All questions regarding girls can be discussed here.	169	3372	Thu Jun 18, 2009 11:00 am jusco
Food & Beverage Share your thoughts on recipes, restaurants and all things food-related.	127	1279	Thu Jun 18, 2009 10:51 am jusco
Mind, Health & Fitness Chill with healthy discussion of the physical and mental.	490	2436	Wed Jun 17, 2009 8:04 pm esyaque
Multimedia Share your music videos, movie clips, audio clips and etc here.	83	879	Sat Jun 13, 2009 3:33 am magriang
Pet Lovers Own a cute canine or feline? An avid bird lover or fish fanatic? Join us here!	55	435	Wed Jun 17, 2009 9:05 pm zuraida
Travel	--	--	Thu Jun 18, 2009 10:42 am

Start Chapter 8 - Draft2.doc Document2 - Microsoft Malaysia Forums Mal... My Pictures 5:18 p.m.

General Talks

- Business and Advertisement
- Computer, Internet, Mobile Phone & Electronics
- Multimedia
- Mind, Health, Fitness
- Girls Talk
- Food and Beverages
- Academic Concerns
- Just Chat



Classified Ads

- Property Ads
- Jobs
- Classified Ads

Help and Suggestions

- Feedback and Suggestions

(Source: PJNet, 2009)

Figure 6.3: PJNet On-line Community Forum



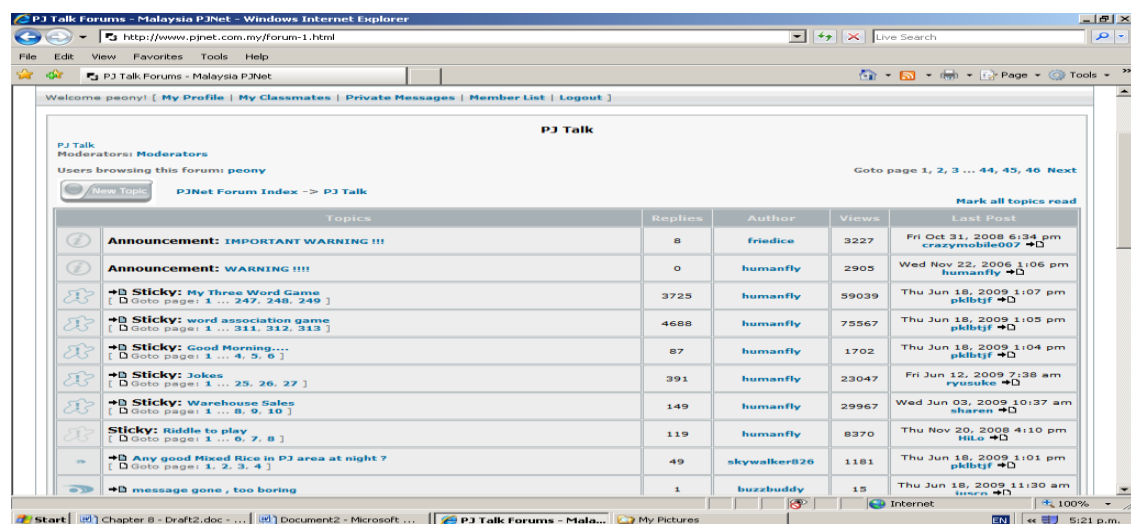


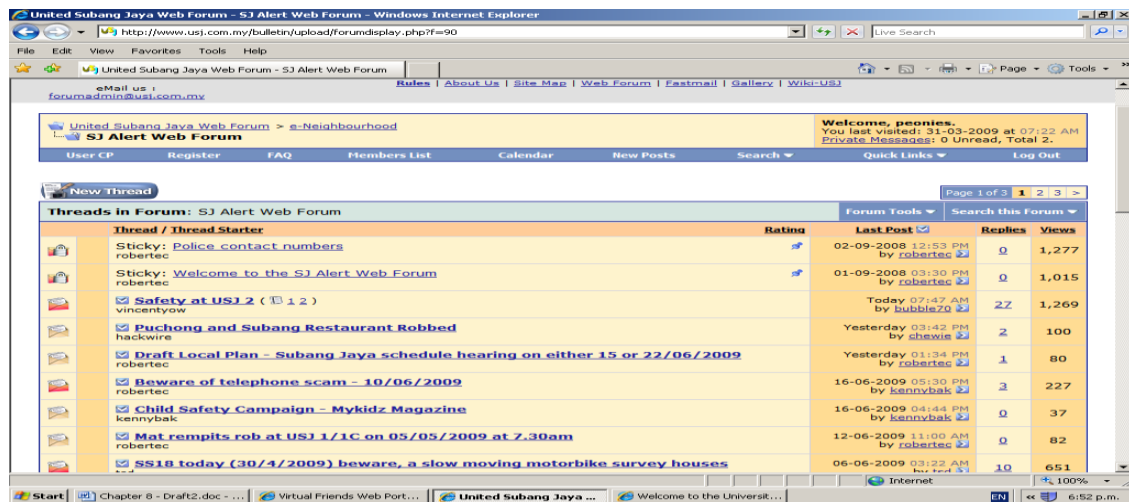
Discussion

- Agama (Religion) Corner
- Arts and Entertainment
- Ask the Men
- Ask the Women
- Automobile
- Classified
- Computing and Technology
- Current Issue
- English
- Experience
- Feedback
- Food & Meal
- General
- Health, Beauty and Fitness

(Source: VirtualFriends.net, 2009)

Figure 6.4: VirtualFriends.net On-line Community Forum





(Sources: PJNet and USJ Subang Jaya, 2009)

Figure 6.5: Threads or Topics Discussed in PJ Talk and SJ Alert Web Forum

Exchanging knowledge, ideas and sharing information are normal occurrences in a community forum. For SNS on-line communities like MalaysiaMAYA.com and VirtualFriends.net, topics discussed are usually varied, ranging from current issues such as political debates, economic and social problems to leisure subjects such as music, foods and vacations. In these communities, networks and potential for members' interaction through issues were not significantly observable, as the focus is more on direct connection or communication with individuals as selected friends. However, website forums have been an important medium for the other kinds of on-line communities like USJ, PJNet, SARA and FamilyPlace.com because they provide not only a room for talking about general matters, but also a special place for discussing issues related to the purposes of creating the community. FamilyPlace.com, for instance, was created as a community of interest, specializing in the topic of parenting and children. Therefore, most of the topics discussed were based on common family issues, education and children such as runaway teenagers, child health or the matter of how to find a good school for disabled children. Having similar goals and interests in subjects, members are usually aware of the target community, thus leading to more comfortable communication in sharing information, knowledge and experiences with each other.

Residential-based on-line communities like USJ, PJNet and SARA, on the other hand, showed even more potential for social networking and integration, since the

existence of the community itself is due to a local community demand. As neighbourhoods that were developed in the midst of urban areas and busy environments, a sense of belonging amongst local members is claimed to have decreased, mainly due to physical segregation and the huge prefecture of housing estates. As well as this, many of the individual commitments were also associated with the fact that members only occasionally meet their neighbours face-to-face. Taking part in virtual communities though, may help provide a convenient space for the communities to create a sense of close community that people are looking for. The existence of virtual communities has made it possible for them to meet with other community members and, more importantly lets them use the medium to effectively discuss any issue regarding their living spaces. Without setting a particular time, date and place, residents can still join, meet and chat with their neighbours virtually at the time and place of their choice. Regular messages posted on the community websites and current issues discussed may help keep the community updated with important issues that concern them.

“Basically, it [SARA] is geared to work for the residents in Setia Alam, potential buyers [and] existing home owners. We would like to see a neighbourhood that is really close-knit. When we grow up we used to be close to our neighbours and over time we have noticed that we are [now] not too close [to our neighbours]. It is the idea that at least [through] online community, even though we cannot meet face to face, we still know each other, our neighbours.”

(S1, 2008)

“[The creation of the on-line community] is actually part of the objective to get people together and to help each other in PJ’s community where they can, say for example [talk about] events, family days or what is happening [in surrounding areas] [such as] warehouse sales or [a new] shopping centre. They put the information in there (the community website) so [the community can] share the information. [It is basically] more about information sharing and discussion of topics.”

(P1, 2008)

As can be seen in the Figure 6.3, a residential based on-line community such as PJNet provides a special space in the forum for members to talk about any issues regarding the community, along with other general topics to choose from. In the above-mentioned figure, PJNet provides “PJ Talk” as a room for information exchange about the PJ area. USJ and SARA provide a similar space which mainly functions as a “one-

stop-centre” for members to talk about anything in their neighbourhoods. One of the most important subjects commonly discussed in this particular area was local security, including current incidents in respective residential areas. Issues of concern included cases of theft and other crimes that were either currently happening or that community members should be aware of and take precautions against. Other topics discussed include the matter of local amenities and facilities, charities, social concerns, public events and sports and recreation. Through the web communities, members can easily locate this kind of information and from the same medium they can easily respond and discuss matters that need urgent solutions.

6.2.2 From On-line to Off-line

The selected on-line communities in this study have not only shown a great flow of networks and active interaction in the on-line medium, but demonstrated the capability to bridge the interaction between members from on-line to off-line.

For VirtualFriends.net and MalaysiaMAYA.com, face-to-face gatherings are a common activity and function as a symbol of real friendships that are normally expressed in various ways, ranging from individual to group meetings. As these communities normally attract teenagers and young adults as members, meetings are normally based on personal dating or leisure activities. Social events such as sporting tournaments, reunions, social parties and formal dinners were amongst the popular activities conducted by these on-line communities. VirtualFriends.net, for instance, appeared to be a well-known on-line community in Malaysia which has successfully developed many healthy programs for youth. The community is recognized as a role model for on-line communities in Malaysia for its active promotion of programmes that encourage young people to get involved in positive activities such as bowling tournaments and camping for nature conservation.¹⁰ Some planned activities were based

¹⁰ The community success stories have been reported in a local English newspaper, *News Straits Time Press* (NST) and also been placed in a special column in Malaysia’s popular teenage magazine – *Remaja* (Teenagers).

on special occasions such as “a breakfast gathering in the month of Ramadhan”¹¹ and “open-houses” for celebrating big festivals like Eid or *Hari Raya Aidilfitri*¹². The off-line gatherings were seen as valuable for the members apart from building a strong sense of community: the real meeting established virtual friendships and helped reinforce cultural aspects that are shared by the majority of members.

FamilyPlace.com has also strengthened on-line networking by gathering members off-line during formal occasions such as forums, seminars and talks organized by either the administrator or members. The programs were even claimed to have greater participation than on-line: according to the community administrators, “70% of the [community] activities happen outside the web” (F1 & F2, 2008). The events, held all over the country, have opened up wide opportunities for community members to meet up with other virtual members and help foster social networking with newly-joined off-line members. Other than formal activities, FamilyPlace.com members have also organized social trips to promote social interaction on an informal level. The gatherings were seen by the administrators as a natural approach to integrate and introduce members in a conducive and leisurely way, and provide convenient opportunities for members to get to know each other.

“Since we started, we've met many friends. Initially, in the last few years we initiated a lot of activities like seminars, forums and even trips such as visiting the TV3 studio or a bird park. We started all that but gradually other members took their places and are running all the activities on their own. So now there are like several groups starting different things and establishing relationships through FamilyPlace.com. They (the members) do not know each other but just say ‘who's interested in coming?’ and that's how [they create] the networks and make friends.”

(F1 & F2, 2008)

Residential-based on-line communities USJ, PJNet and SARA were purposely formed to enhance off-line gatherings through the virtual medium. Because these communities were established to emphasize a sense of neighbourhood, many of the

¹¹ As a member of the VirtualFriends.net on-line community, I have had an opportunity to join the “breakfast gathering for celebrating Ramadhan” (Month in Islamic Calendar) in September 2008 and found it to be a great experience. I met some on-line friends in the meeting and we still do keep in touch.

¹² Eid, also called *Hari Raya Aidilfitri* in Malay language, is a religious celebration for all Muslims worldwide. In Malaysia, Eid is one of the biggest annual celebrations and is celebrated by the Malay-Muslims.

activities designed were mainly based on community social events and gatherings that need to be carried out in a real-life setting. Each community has their own ways of facilitating the meetings. USJ and PJNet, for example, set up meetings called TT Sessions (*Teh Tarik* Session or Tea session) on regular basis. SARA, as illustrated in Figure 6.6, has used the on-line community to organize off-line activities, such as sports tournaments, music and fashion, children's activities, casual gatherings and cultural celebrations. Generally, all of the community are incorporated by an interactive notice board for registered members allowing feedback, comments and suggestions, which could help the proposed activities or events become more community-friendly and get support from everybody.

“...sometimes we don't even know our neighbours so at least this way [through the on-line community] we may not see them face to face because of different work times, but on-line we know each other, in fact, I know some members who actually meet up off-line, in a coffee shop, at gatherings, things like that.”

(S1, 2008)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Balai Polis</i> (Police Post) Setia Alam Opening Ceremony • Mini Marathon 2009 • Tai Chi Martial Arts Sessions in Setia Alam • Setia Alam Community *** • Easter Sunday Sunrise Service on 12/04/2009 • Blood donation • Setia Kids Club (SKC) Events • Badminton Session • Meeting SARA people • Setia Alam Chinese New Year Event • Mini Gathering – Sunday 28 December 2008 • Casual Meet up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deeparaya Open House @ Dewan MamaMia the Musical • Mooncake Lantern Festival • All You Can Eat Buffet-Dinner Gathering • Family and Friends Portrait • Cocktail and Setia Welcome Centre • Eco Family Day • Dinner @ Impian 3 • Lunch 1pm, Sun 1st June, Eramas New Century • Meeting This Sunday? • Michael Wong Concut @ Setia Eco Park • Resident Meeting
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(Source: SARA, 2008)

Figure 6.6: SARA Gathering and Events

6.2.3 Social Capital

The way on-line communities in this study function to facilitate on-line interaction and off-line social gatherings has not only illustrated the success of the communities in serving as a new medium for social networking, but also exemplifies a flourishing form of integration and social capital amongst members. All the administrators have shown positive reactions towards the social influence that is evident in their respective on-line communities. They argued that the creation of the communities has also created many benefits for the members and provided a support system across the groups. Some have indicated that there is noticeable evidence of collective ideas and cooperative actions arising in the communities, which really helps to solve problems for either a particular member or the community as a whole.

Information sharing, discussions and arguments that happen largely on the community website forums represent the way members interact and communicate, working towards mutual benefits. For example, both the administrators of PJNet and USJ on-line communities have mentioned that the community members regularly use the on-line medium to share information about many things, including security issues in their surrounding residential areas, as mentioned above. Located in urban districts, both communities are highly exposed to appalling problems such as robbery, break-ins and other threatening crimes. However, due to large neighbourhood areas, cooperation between residents regarding this issue was previously ineffective. The existence of on-line communities offers a tremendous opportunity as it provides a new means of collaboration. Having an on-line community which functions as a place to meet virtually, the teamwork amongst members was made easier. Through this on-line medium they share their stories, discuss ways to find solutions and work together to prevent future problems.

“Because [we live] in an urban area, we do not have time to sit down [and talk to each other]. [With an availability of the community forum] we can catch up on any subject, for example sports events in the community. In the [online] community, people can give feedback and all [other members therefore] can [also] access [the feedback] [from the same medium]. In the online community, they [can] bring up something that happened in the housing area so that other [members] could be aware of it. For example, in PJ area, there are [many sections] such as PJSS1, PJSS2 and PJSS3. Let's say,

something happened in PJSS3, a robbery for example, [members] [can post in the forum] and say ‘there's a robbery in some [place], beware of it!’ So they will work together to catch the person. Like what had happened in the USJ before, there was a robbery done by a Camry's car gang. The community placed the [car] plate numbers [on the website] [so that everybody could] see it. When people saw the [car] [with the same] plate number, they [managed] to call each other and the [robbers] finally got caught.”

(P1, 2008)

Other interesting evidence shows how the USJ on-line community was used by residents as a platform to fight for their rights against local municipalities (MPSJ) in relation to assessments issue that affected them as local people. According to the USJ administrator, U1, the community website played an important role in gathering support from residents. Because there is such a large population in USJ, forming a group of people in real life to discuss the issue would have been impossible. The existence of the USJ on-line community provides a space for every member to be involved and take part in a discussion virtually. It helped the community to get together and use the medium to confront the problem, leading to their success in winning the case.

“They all started with the problem of the assessment rates. It is overpriced and of course everybody does not know what to do and he [Jeff Oii] got people to communicate by e-mail. He formed a group [in the community website] and then, they got together to fight for their right [over MPSJ]. They got what they wanted and they [managed] to call for it [the assessment rates] to be reduced.”

(U1, 2008)

Although there is collaboration in cases of fighting for rights, on-line communities have also functioned to assist aid organizations. SARA and USJ have provided a special space in the website for promoting various charity programs, including a blood donation to entire communities. Called the “Blood Bank” program, the plan was purposely created to assist people who urgently need blood for surgery or have had accidents. Through on-line advertisement, members are encouraged to give any information about possible donors or patients and can also spread the news to others outside the community. According to the USJ administrator, U1, many people have already benefited from the program and it has become a well-known example of the initiative shown among the creations of USJ on-line community.

Despite the aid programmes that were purposely created, USJ has celebrated various other collaborations amongst members, especially in providing personal help. Since it was formed, the community has successfully built a sense of belonging and established community teamwork through assisting other members who need particular assistance. Experiences of collecting money to help a sick teenager and a woman who suffered from chronic illness were part of the affirmative efforts made by the on-line community members. It shows how the community has successfully integrated the members towards communal responsibility and, more importantly, reflects the development of trust and reciprocity between members, which is very significant for building and maintaining a healthy community. Below are the two stories which reflect the cooperation that was built among the members of the USJ on-line community:

“We had a girl who has [a] problem with a nerve disease. One of the things is she had loss of her hearing. She needed to go to the United States for surgery where they artificially link her hearing to the hearing part of the brain, so she can hear again. It cost about RM300,000. So she came in [to the website forum] and says ‘I’m making T-shirts [to sell to fund my surgery]’. We met at one TT session [and] I talked to her mother [because] she was already deaf at that time. She brought all the T-shirts and everybody bought [all the T-shirts].....She eventually collected enough money and went for the operation [and now] she can hear again. She came back and sent me a message of appreciation [for what the community had done]. I said there is no need to thank us. We are glad to help people and everybody is happy helping each other, so that is good enough for us.”

(U1, 2008)

“There was one guy [who said that] his friend’s sister needed to go for an amputation [due to diabetes]. He asked [in the community forum] [for a donation] for [buying] a new bed for the girl [which] cost about RM2000. So I said, ok, is there anyone, who wants to donate to buy this lady a [new] bed? They (the community members) do not [even] know who she was [but they agreed to donate]. I said ok, we will go ahead and we keep his bank number. We all put money in and he collected enough. Once he finished collecting the money [and was about to buy the bed] the lady died. He told us that now the money cannot be used to buy the bed, but the lady’s sister asked if it was possible to use the money for the funeral and everybody said ok. You’d be surprised, you do not know who the person is [but] because it’s a person we trust, when he said needed money for somebody [we gave money].”

(U1, 2008)

The FamilyPlace.com members experienced more emotional support than material. As a community which is aimed at assisting parents and children, FamilyPlace.com plays an important role in providing a platform for members to discuss and help each other, especially those who suffer from domestic problems. Issues such as a crisis with children, low achievement in education and abusive husbands were amongst the cases posted by members who sought advice, encouragement or just opinions. The FamilyPlace.com administrators may provide help by distributing the cases to be shared with other members. When there were cases which could not be handled by the community, they would then be referred to public agencies, which would be responsible for further action.

“We receive emails on the daily basis. [Most of the emails are about] children and health, problems at school and even about abusive husbands and runaway teenagers. We handle things that we can [by sharing with other members] but certain things [we can't handle] we direct to AWAM.”

(F1 & F2, 2008)

Another well-known story regarding FamilyPlace.com was the initiative of this community to act as an official host for the Malaysian Home School program. The program was concerned with assisting parents and students who want to choose independent learning or home schooling. Many community members volunteered to become support staff and collaborate to maintain and help make the program successful. As the program is relatively new in Malaysia, the effort made by FamilyPlace.com was seen as very encouraging and helped to provide alternative ways for parents and children who are unable to join the mainstream school system, either due to disabilities or simply as an endeavour to try out a new means of learning.

6.3 Theme #2: Trust and Negotiation

In general, social networks, social integration and social capital among members in all selected on-line communities have seen considerable growth. As illustrated by administrators, one of the key things that help these communities still maintain and constitute the kind of community they wish to be is the way they are operated and

monitored. In spite of existing in the virtual world, the communities still need to be governed as well as a real community does. Being virtual is no reason for members to behave indiscriminately. The nature of on-line communities, consisting of anonymous invisible members and depending merely on text communication has potentially encouraged misbehaving amongst members, including identity fraud. Moreover, because everybody is allowed to contribute ideas, information and feedback on the community website (especially in the forum room), the tendency towards outspoken opinions is huge for on-line communities. Without any regulations that make it clear how members should behave in the community, the users or members can misuse the medium in many ways. People can upload, post, publish, transmit and reproduce content that might violate and break the trust of other members. False information, hateful, abusive, offensive, harassing and racist messages and many other actions which are considered objectionable and unlawful¹³ are considered unethical and unacceptable to be distributed across the communities.

“In the Internet forums, you will get [people from] all sources coming in and saying a lot of things and then it becomes a problem. People were arguing in the forum. [They were] getting personal and when things develop into an argument level and that is bad. So they need to be moderated.”

(U1, 2008)

“Because some people's wording will differ in the way they put things [in the forum discussion]. Some [things they talk about] are very sensitive. In certain [conditions], maybe the person might say something about a person a certain way, but other person might misinterpret [the wording or thought] as a racist statement.”

(P1, 2008)

For all kinds of communities regardless of conventional or virtual, trust among members appears to be a very important element that determines the sustainability and encourages strong ties among members. Trust shapes members' behaviour, and in a virtual community context, where people depend only on text to communicate, being able to trust content is of great importance for building relationships and maintaining the community. Therefore, when people do abusive things, for instance, giving false

¹³ This includes pornographic images or materials, sexual contents, illegal and prohibited items such as software, music and videos and many more. See Appendix 6A for details.

information or arguing with each other in an unacceptable manner, it is very dangerous and very upsetting for the communities because they feel that they now belong to an insecure community and members are less likely to be trusted. Over time, this misleading behaviour can gradually erode the community because, for this kind of community, its sustainability is dependent on the dynamic of active members and how they complement each other in achieving goals. Without trust and respect, nobody would become a member and with current members no longer visiting the website, the community would be left inoperative and in the long run it would eventually disappear.

In order to keep the community close, sustainable and to restrain members from acting deceptively, five out of six on-line communities in this study have established 'Forum Rules and Regulations' intended to guide the way members behave when posting messages or opinions in the website forums. USJ, SARA, PJNet, MalaysiaMAYA.com and VirtualFriends.net provide procedures in their respective websites explaining the conduct and responsibilities that either the soon-to-be or current members must adhere to. FamilyPlace.com, however, is the only community which does not provide any regulations of conduct or terms of use while registering.

“...because the problem [in the forum] has reached argument level I created a list of rules, because without rules, you cannot control the people. So we started to be very strict. And by applying the rules, we put everything back in order and [therefore] they do not go in and create non-sensible arguments.”

(U1, 2008)

In general, anybody who wishes to sign up as a registered member of the five on-line communities mentioned is firstly required to accept the 'Terms of Use'¹⁴ before they can become legitimate members. Those who do not agree with the prepared regulations are automatically disqualified. Even though the presentation of the rules seems to limit member's freedom of speech and activities, the regulations are rationally acceptable from the perspective of “community protection”. In real-world communities, many social institutions play a role in serving the society. Local authorities, law enforcement and public security are among the prime agencies which function to balance and control the social conditions in order to help keep the society living

¹⁴ See Appendix 6A for an extract of the Terms of Use of five out of six selected on-line communities.

harmoniously. As in a virtual community, the same practice is used but in slightly different ways where legitimate power is available to administrators or whoever is responsible for managing the community. Members are given a set of rules and they are bonded to the agreement that they accept to make sure that they respect each other and keep the communities' activities running in appropriate ways. Two of the administrators (S1 and P1) have shown a positive attitude towards moderating their on-line communities. The way they managed the communities and the reasons that lie beneath the actions are illustrated through the following quotes:

“We actually go through everything. Because the forum is not big yet, we manage to go through to [all] posts. As if we see something that we think is too sensitive [to be posted on the forum] we remove the post and highlight this to the member that posted it.”

(S1, 2008)

“I have to say [the success of the communities] also depends on how the communities are moderated. If they are not properly moderated and they are not controlled properly, I would think that eventually it may get out of hand. But I would say positively that if it is moderated well and if everyone is mature enough and then yes, [the online communities] do have a positive [impact].”

(S1, 2008)

“I am very strict [when it comes to the race issue]. When they talk about any other race [in the website forum], I straight away delete the post. [It is] because we do not want to brand our website as a racist website. I do want to do that at all because I believe that we all Malaysians, not really Malays, Chinese or Indians, we all Malaysians.”

(P1, 2008)

Evidence gathered from experiences and events that occurred in selected on-line communities suggest that virtual communication does facilitate social networking, increase opportunities for social interaction and help generate social capital and integration across members. However, this implies a rather general view without taking into account any collaboration and interaction that happens between different ethnic individuals or groups. While the focus of this study is to see whether communication and interaction through on-line communities impacts and creates a form of integration among Malaysia's diverse ethnicities, discussion will be further narrowed down to this specific aspect through the next theme discussed.

6.4 Theme #3: Inter-ethnic Integration On-line and Off-line

Discussing ethnic integration in the context of virtual communication is rather new in Malaysia. Practically, the approach chosen in this current research does differ from the way the issue has been investigated in the past, for instance, examining ethnic relations within physical circumstances, such as in the field of education (Jamil, et al., 2004), in a work place (Bustami, 2003) or a neighbourhood area (Ahmad & Syed Abdul Rashid, 2005; Osman, 1990). The presence of people in virtual spaces leaves aside their unique identities and diverse personal backgrounds and brings into consideration how relationships are changed by this new reality.

While arguments concerning building social capital and social integration in Theme #1 and Theme #2 have positively illustrated the promise of cohesiveness through on-line communication and interaction, careful analysis of inter-ethnic interaction off-line based on administrators' views suggest otherwise. Questions about the level of participation and the prospect of interaction amongst diverse ethnicities have accumulated rather different feedback from different administrators and generally reflect multiple views on ethnicity issues. This proposes a limitation to Putnam's discussion of social capital, which tends to focus on homogenous communities; the issue of ethnicity is absent in his analysis.

There are three distinctive patterns of inter-ethnic interaction that can be extracted based on illustrations given by the on-line community administrators. The first is associated with the condition where all ethnic groups are involved in on-line/off-line interaction and participation. The second pattern refers to multi-ethnic participation on-line but only particular ethnic groups finding support in off-line activities; the third pattern demonstrates the circumstances where there is only one particular ethnicity dominating the community on-line and off-line.

6.4.1 Pattern 1: All Ethnic Groups

Three on-line communities, FamilyPlace, SARA and MalaysiaMAYA.com, are positioned in the first pattern. According to FamilyPlace.com administrators F1 and F2, the on-line community has attracted multi-ethnic participation since its early formation.

Community objectives that mainly focused on family and child development were seen as a factor of attraction to keep this community constantly gathering people, regardless of ethnicities and other social backgrounds. The nature of the topics discussed, which are considered a “universal subject of interest” allows for the transition of the new information and knowledge to occur on a global scale.

As mentioned earlier in theme #1, FamilyPlace.com has actively functioned as a medium to organize community activities, not only in a virtual mode, but also in real-world settings. A series of conferences, talks, seminars and numerous informal meetings were among several programs conducted by the administrators or members that provide the community with a chance to meet their on-line friends face-to-face. These initiatives were made for the community to continue on-line activities off-line in a way that reinforces the objectives of the community to build cohesiveness towards goals. Some of the programmes scheduled on-line, such as children’s piano competitions and sports tournaments, are amongst examples of how agendas planned on-line were carried out off-line. According to the administrators, any activities related to children were normally supported by multi-ethnic parents and this was always a successful means to integrate people compared to other organized programs. Overall, consideration for the importance of family development, children’s growth, education and also other domestic issues that are the core subjects for this community have been a general concern for groups of parents, teachers and students regardless of what social background they come from. For this particular community, content and issues discussed were seen as a focal factor for bringing ethnicities together as an interest group.

“We are really proud of [ethnic participation in our community] it is really mixed! People are so open and we get such a good mix [of ethnic participation] not just the three main ethnics but also [from other ethnicities like Kadazan and Ibanese [from Sabah and Sarawak] and also overseas members from European countries and the United States.”

(F1 & F2, 2008)

Another on-line community that claims successful integration of its multi-ethnic members is SARA. According to SARA’s administrator S1, the key factors that help the community maintain itself as a unit are the way it is moderated and also a sense of tolerance amongst members. The proportions of ethnicities in the community that show

a large percentage of ethnic Chinese (50%), compared to other ethnicities such as Malays (30%) and Indians (20%), have not had a big influence on how socialization took place either in the on-line medium or off-line. The medium has provided an equal opportunity for all individuals (regardless of their ethnic group) to take part in the forum discussions and get involved in activities that occur on the website. The ability to follow conducts and regulations as set up by the administrator functions as a contributing factor to the acceptance of individual differences among members, and is claimed to have been successful in helping resolve many issues arising on the website.

“We make it clear right away that we are all mature people, so we agree that we have differences but we respect the differences. So far we have not had many issues like [prejudice and racist on the web forum].”

(S1, 2008)

“[In the community forum] we work together [and] we agree on the lots of issues. One issue is a ‘surau’ (prayer place for the Muslims) thing. Some [members made a comment] about the surau speaker¹⁵ [that it is too loud and annoying]. Then, we have a Malay member who approached the ‘surau’ committee and highlighted this [matter]. So I think it is a good thing [because] it goes both ways. We are not angry against one another but we know everyone tries to make things better.”

(S1, 2008)

While networking and interaction between members of different ethnicities is thriving on the community website, many activities that were planned and organized on-line have also been successfully carried out off-line. According to SARA’s administrator S1, many programmes such as family days, sports and tournaments and various cultural festivals have been highly supported by multi-ethnic members. As a residential-based community that aims to unite its diverse ethnic members towards creating a cooperative society, SARA endeavours to facilitate face-to-face meetings rather than merely on-line. The administrator asserts that a real meeting is important for members to get together to discuss social issues or future plans that are not possible to discuss on-line. It is also essential to encouraging a sense of belonging amongst diverse

¹⁵ There is a ‘calling for prayer’ or *azan* (in Malay language) from the *surau* for every prayer time which takes place five times a day. The ‘bilal’ (person in-charge of the prayer calling) may use a loud speaker to perform *azan* to make sure that the calling message reaches everybody (the Muslims) in the surrounding neighbourhood.

ethnic members. He further claimed that having durable support for multi-ethnic members is beneficial for the Setia Alam neighbourhood as a whole.

“We had a lion show last Chinese New Year organized by the [Setia Alam] [housing] developer. We told each other [about the event] and said, ‘hey lets come and meet up’. We had Muslim members and Indian members all appear. So we met up.”

(S1, 2008)

MalaysiaMAYA.com is another community in the group that celebrates diversity among its members. The on-line community has almost equal percentages of Malaysian multi-ethnic and International registered members, which facilitates a high possibility of networking, not only between the locals, but also with outsiders. While there is no evidence of strong networks happening between Malaysian and foreign members, the administrator believes that interaction and integration between at least three major groups in Malaysia is flourishing through the community networks. MalaysiaMAYA.com attracts mostly young people who joined the community mainly to establish relationships with their old or new friends. The group was described as open-minded and has construed friendships with others regardless of ethnicities, rather based on similar interests or hobbies. Social gatherings and parties were said to be activities that were organized mostly on-line and attracted members from diverse backgrounds to meet each other face-to-face. Hence, the establishment of the relationships is continuously strengthened through on-line conversation.

“I can see the Chinese and the Malays interact with each other in the community forum. They also set up social events in the provided column, calling for any members who wish to join in. They organize social gatherings when they have enough members to.”

(M1, 2008)

6.4.2 Pattern 2: Particular Ethnic Groups

All on-line communities selected in this study have demonstrated policies of equality in accepting every individual regardless of their social background to become members. Therefore, an approximate proportion of membership according to ethnicities as provided by administrators showed the tendency of mixed ethnic participation in every community. While FamilyPlace.com, SARA and MalaysiaMAYA.com have

displayed a positive outcome of ethnic relations in the respective on-line and off-line communities, in contrast, two on-line communities in this study have encountered a problem with inter-ethnic interaction off-line. PJNet and USJ are residential-based on-line communities in two major urban localities in Klang Valley, known as the most developed and mix-populous region in the city. For the administrators, the communities have successfully verified that communication through modern technology, such as that brought about by the Internet, has helped unite the community and assist the locals in efficiently solving many topical issues. Both administrators have observed that multi-ethnic members, mainly from the three major groups – Malays, Chinese and Indians – are fully utilizing the medium to interact and share information with one other. They further argue that by supporting all activities on-line, the on-line communities could be seen as a venue for people from different ethnic backgrounds to develop greater understanding and respect for each other.

“We have been doing this since 1999. It is almost 10 years [and] it [USJ] still active. You'd be surprised! There are lots of people who post. Some of them are obviously Malays. They can put their name and you know [who they are] and yet, people will still respond. It is not like that, in my community (Chinese majority), I don't want to talk to them (the Malays). No, it does not happen. There was a Malay lady I think who was looking for accommodation, childcare and someone came and gave her addresses. [We know that the person was Malay because] she said ‘I want Halal [things]’ that was obvious [that the person was Malay Muslim].”

(U1, 2008)

While administrators see the level of ethnic participation as considerably high in the on-line medium, they argue that the circumstances changed when it came to off-line activities. PJNet and USJ arrange off-line meetings amongst members on a regular basis. Informal dinners or tea together is an example of how real gatherings are planned to integrate members towards more promising relationships. Both communities, however, have had disappointing support from multi-ethnic members for such events. According to the administrators, off-line gatherings have only been supported and dominated by a large proportion of ethnic Chinese and a very small percentage of ethnic Indians. The Malays were observably showing the least cooperation and at times there was no participation from them at all.

“There are a few Indians we did have. We know that there are Malays in there [participating in the community forum] but when it comes to TT (Teh Tarik/Tea) session, [the participants were] predominantly Chinese.”

(U1, 2008)

“We do go for *mamak* (an Indian Muslim’s food stall/restaurant). But I don’t see [Malays attending]. I don’t know why.”

(P1, 2008)

6.4.3 Pattern 3: Domination of an Ethnic Group

As a plural society with long standing ethnic tensions and socio-economic inequalities, there is a higher probability that the existence of on-line communities in Malaysia could promote polarization if they were dominated by one ethnic group. Many factors could be an influence, including the way communities set their goals, regulate activities and design the site and/or content. For example, one out of the six on-line communities (VirtualFriends.net) in this study appeared to show a homogenous pattern, where the community’s registered members were approximately 99% Malay members. VirtualFriends.net, like any other social networking site, was originally formed by diverse ethnic groups to facilitate social networking amongst individuals or groups. Founded and managed by Malay administrators, this community is designed to welcome and serve every member equally, regardless of ethnicity, class or gender. However, according to the administrators, the number of registered members of Malays has increased over time, leaving behind members from other ethnicities. This has resulted in the domination of the Malays while other ethnicities were seen as secondary groups in the community, less active and inconspicuous amongst the dominant group.

Because of the Malay dominance, the community shows a high propensity for reinforcing the group’s social culture in most of the activities performed on-line and off-line. As claimed by the administrators, this factor has discouraged other members, from Chinese and Indians ethnic groups in particular, to join the community because they might feel inferior, uncomfortable or not accepted by the large proportion of ethnic Malay members. VirtualFriends.net members also utilize the Malay language in on-line

conversation¹⁶ and most of the topics discussed reflect the interests of this particular ethnic group. As for off-line gatherings, the organized events were attended only by Malays and most of the activities planned were heavily influenced by the social characteristics and typical norms that belong to the ethnic group. For example, if SARA has an annual celebration for its multi-ethnic members by organizing *GongXi-Raya* or *DeepaRaya*¹⁷, VirtualFriends.net only celebrates *Hari Raya* for Malays because they are the majority and there are no other ethnic groups participating in the community.

Even though VirtualFriends.net can be considered an active on-line community, it has successfully gathered and reinforced a sense of belonging with increased civic engagement only amongst its homogenous members. Considering social relationships with other groups, i.e. the non-Malays, this on-line community failed to reflect inclusive networking that tends to bring together people across diverse social divisions. Overall, the experience of this on-line community can be best linked to the concept of bonding social capital rather than bridging.

Table 6.1: Three Patterns of Ethnic Socialization and Networks in Six Selected On-line Communities

Pattern	Description	On-line Community(s)
#1	All ethnicities participate and interact in on-line/off-line activities.	FamilyPlace.com, SARA and MalaysiaMAYA.com
#2	Multi-ethnic participation on-line with only particular ethnic groups supported in off-line activities.	PJNet and USJ Subang Jaya
#3	Particular ethnic dominating the community activities on-line and off-line.	VirtualFriends.net

¹⁶ The Malay language is an official language for the Malay ethnic group and also acts as a national language in Malaysia. Other ethnicities, such as Chinese and Indians, are observably more comfortable using their own languages or English language in daily communication, making the Malay language a second or third language for those particular ethnicities.

¹⁷ *GongXi Raya* and *DeepaRaya* refer to annual celebrations which are celebrated together by particularly ethnic Chinese and Malays (*GongXi Raya*) and ethnic Indians and Malays (*DeepaRaya*) through the concept of sharing a social gathering called an 'open house'. During the celebration, individuals or groups will organize a social party which will be attending by multi-ethnic participants. The program was fully supported by the Malaysian government as a way to reinforce a sense of unity in Malaysia's plural society.

The three above patterns have demonstrated that there are complex conditions at work when analysing relationships between different ethnicities in different kinds of on-line communities. Whilst on-line communities in Pattern 1 have shown strong promise, the remaining others suggest uncertainty in on-line and off-line inter-ethnic relationships. Analysis that came from the on-line communities in Pattern 2 and 3 indicate that there is noticeable concern for the low degree of participation on-line/off-line between the two groups, “Malay” and “non-Malay”. Views by the administrators pointed out that class, culture and language-use play a significant role in shaping inter-ethnic interaction.

6.5 Themes # 4: Class Differences and Language Use

Inequalities exist in all types of society and have been a factor in segregating people for a long time. They can exist in many different forms such as wealth or property, or between individuals due to gender or age. From a sociological perspective, inequalities are referred to as social stratification which can be defined as “structured inequalities between different groupings of people” (Giddens, 1998; p.240). According to Giddens (1998), “stratification in the society can be distinguished as four basic systems that is; slavery, caste, estates and class” (p.240). Each system is different from another based on its establishment. Whilst the first three systems are instituted by legal or religious provisions, class systems are typically more fluid than others and depend more on economic differences between groups or individuals (Giddens, 1998).

In Malaysia, divergence between people is largely associated with class. Class differences are usually based on different patterns of economic control and resources upheld by different ethnic groups. The Chinese, for instance, have been claimed to be a group that controls the country’s economy through business and trade since independence. The Malays, whilst being “sons of the soil” or so called *Bumiputra*, a majority in the total population, are referred to as a middle and/or lower class, largely involved in the state administration sector and public social services including small-scale agriculture-based activities in rural areas. The economic sector and business practices within this group are growing though under various Government support

policies, but is still relatively weak compared to the Chinese. Indians and other minorities, in contrast, are more associated with mixed economic sectors, predominantly in professional fields, large-scale plantations and industrial-based economies.

Observation of class differences in Malaysian society is associated with the fraction of economic distribution and is considered as one of the contributing factors towards polarization and disintegration between ethnicities (Salleh, 1986; Embong, 1986). The different levels of achievement and status attributed to different groups have strongly influenced the type of lifestyle the groups are able to lead. These result in the way they choose their living areas and groups they are associated with, including motivation to achieve other desirable social interests like choices in education and occupation.

Whilst a group of people are normally recognized by class differences based on economic and social status, these indicators are almost unidentifiable when these different ethnic groups are brought together in a virtual context. On-line community members are anonymous as long as they do not reveal their real identities. Class differences disappear between members in virtual conditions because social structures based on levels of income or property no longer exists in such circumstances. When there is an opportunity for them to disclose their social status as in SNS on-line communities, the information given is not necessarily true, and rather depends on the level of trust among members towards the information given. Yet, in a virtual medium where relationships among users or members are only dependent on text communication, other indicators such as language use might help identify someone of a different ethnic group across the invisible members. The language used in communication often acts as an alternative symbol to identify on-line groups and their original social class.

Bahasa Malaysia or the Malaysian language has been constituted as the national language. Initially, it was known as *Bahasa Melayu* or the Malay language, referring to the language spoken by the majority of ethnic Malays. The change made to *Bahasa Malaysia* or the Malaysian language was to encourage the nation to use the national language for everyday conversation, as a way to enforce social integration through a concept of “one language” for the purpose of national unity. Despite these efforts, the

use of *Bahasa Malaysia* has been met with resistance amongst non-Malays, especially Chinese and Indians. These groups prefer speaking either their mother tongues, (Mandarin, Cantonese and Hokkien for Chinese and Tamil for Indians) or English (Ismail, 1986). A study supporting this (Jamil, et al., 2004), which examines ethnic interaction between school students in Malaysia, has indicated that language has been a barrier in improving a high social interaction levels among students of different ethnic groups. Chinese students tend to face difficulties in interacting and communicating confidently with Malay students because they cannot speak *Bahasa Malaysia* fluently.

The problem of language use in on-line communication is seen as a factor in shaping inter-ethnic interaction. This trend is clearly shown in the three on-line communities (USJ, PJNet and VirtualFriends.net) where language is claimed to be a major contributor to the lack of participation and interaction between Malay and non-Malay members. Both Malay and non-Malay administrators agree that communicating in English has been a problem for most of the Malay members whose language abilities remain inadequate. However, they do have different views when explaining the issue based on their own experiences and observations of their respective on-line communities.

For the non-Malay administrators, using the English language in on-line communication should not be an issue because they believe that most Malaysians understand the language very well due to the status of the English language as the second most widely spoken in the country. They also agree that the majority of ethnic Chinese and Indians can communicate in English better than in Malay and prefer to use the language in everyday conversation. However, by doing so, they did not see the language as a factor for social closure¹⁸ of others who were unable to communicate in English. Instead, they speak the language because they are used to it and feel more comfortable doing so. The non-Malay administrators also suggest that not all members in the on-line communities speak proper English and therefore, they refuse to associate with those speaking poor English; language here becomes a form of social segregation.

¹⁸ Social closure can be defined as any process whereby groups try to maintain exclusive control over resources (Koch, 2003). Frank Parkin (cited in Koch, 2003), a British author, has agreed with Max Weber that the ownership of property and the means of production is a basic foundation of class structure. However, property, according to Parkin, is only one form of social closure which can be monopolized by a minority and used as a basis of power over others. Beside property or wealth, most of the characteristics that may be used to create social closure are ethnic origin, language and religion.

Nonetheless, members were encouraged to take part in English-based conversation because the information and knowledge shared amongst members is more important than the language.

“Not everybody can speak English. Some Chinese do not even speak English well. You can see the way they write, some purposely but some are just really poor. But nonetheless they do come [in and join the community forum]. But actually the groups that come and meet are likely to be very comfortable with English, then we become friends and we [start getting to] know each other.”

(U1, 2008)

“We are not grammar teachers. In fact it is not only the Malays [who cannot speak and write proper English] we have some that I can see in the forum. They are Chinese speaking people. Their posts sometimes cannot be understood either. But we do not laugh at the person’s language or what they posted [in] [instead] we try to help. Most importantly we look at it and [try to] understand it. We always tell ourselves that this is about being together and [we just need to] accept the differences.”

(S1, 2008)

“Yes, maybe because they (the non-Malays) talk more in English. But we don’t care actually. If you want to use broken English, then use it!”

(P1, 2008)

One of the non-Malay administrators stressed that language use is very significant in determining the level of participation and interaction between members in on-line communities. He argued that the language used must be understood by other members to avoid misunderstandings and prejudice by those who are not capable of comprehending the language. In the case of Malaysian society, speaking in Malay and English is still acceptable in a public conversation, but other particular languages such as Mandarin or Tamil for instance, should be avoided in mixed on-line conversation or even in real conversations because it will promote suspicion amongst the Malays since most of the group’s members have no knowledge of the language at all.

“Originally, we had an idea of having a forum in Chinese and Malay [languages] but we realized that if we started doing that, we would actually break the community. So we decided to stick to English and Malay [languages] and of course we do not stop some people posting a [Chinese word or article] in [the forum] but I myself, cannot write or

read Chinese [very well] so I just want to remind everyone [that] if you want to post [in Chinese] [you have to] translate it a little bit to [let] the rest [of the members who do not understand the language] understand [the posting contents].”

(S1, 2008)

The Malay administrators rather oppose the views of the non-Malays by arguing that the English language was a major issue for most of the Malays due to incompetency in speaking and understanding the language. In a medium of on-line communities where text communication is dominant, the use of language was seen by the administrators as an important vehicle in both expressing ideas and emotional support. Based on their observation of social conditions that appear on VirtualFriends.net, the community's administrators V1 and V2 have suggested that Malay members are more comfortable communicating in the Malay language than English because they can easily use the language to express their feelings, thus expending of what Ibarra (1993) and Gersick et al. (2000) call “soft social capital”, referring to expressive emotional ties that involve the exchange of friendship and support characterized by high levels of closeness and trust (Ibrarra, 1993).

In the situation where members joined the on-line community to seek new friends and share information and knowledge, speaking in the Malay language, according to Malay administrators, is friendlier and can more easily create a sense of belonging among other members without creating ethnic boundaries. Whilst the non-Malay administrators encouraged members to use even broken English in chat or discussion, the idea is rather unacceptable from the Malay administrators' (V1 & V2) perspectives because they felt that the action would negatively influence relationships and members' images. They claimed that inadequate language use could lead to misinterpretation that could further cause misunderstanding towards content. Inability to express ideas in a proper way could also lead to false ideas and messages.

“I don't think that [the on-line community] would enhance inter-ethnic integration. It is because of the language barrier. Other ethnics like Chinese and Indians prefer communicating in English, whilst the Malays cannot speak English fluently. Most of the VirtualFriends.net members are teenagers and they obviously cannot speak and write in English confidently. [When they utilized mostly Malay language in the community forum] it naturally attracted only Malays participation.”

Overall, the Malay administrators believed that the language barrier does play a role in determining social relationships between Malays and non-Malays which, at times, constructs ethnic boundaries between those groups. Both ethnic groups are said to have a strong determination to use their own, or select comfortable languages and this has much influence in a way members select a group of on-line communities to join. By observing common language use in the community forum, they would know the status of the majority of members, eventually affecting their decision of whether or not to participate. Considering this situation, language becomes a vehicle for both inclusionary and exclusionary practices.

6.6 Theme #5: Culture and Religion

Other aspects associated with the challenges in integrating both Malay and non-Malay groups through on-line communities are the cultural and religious differences. Composed primarily of Malays, Chinese and Indians, Malaysia's cultures and religions are best described as hugely varied. Even though each ethnic group is identified by their different cultural and religious backgrounds, they are able to freely practice their beliefs and ways of life as long as they respect each other and show tolerance by accepting differences (Abdullah & Asmuni, 2005). In regards to Malaysia's cultural and religious affiliations, every ethnic group possesses its own distinct values and norms that they perform in their daily routines. This includes the kinds of food they eat, their dress codes, taboos and many more which may or may not be understood by those from other groups.

The matter of certain ethnic groups participating less frequently in off-line gatherings, as observed in USJ, PJNet and VirtualFriends.net on-line communities, has attracted different feedback from the administrators. Both Malay and non-Malay administrators have highlighted that cultural and religious influences are key factors; but, discussion in Theme #1 has indicated that the existence of on-line communities in the midst of the diverse Malaysian society has successfully modified some aspects of social relationships towards promoting national integration in the country. On-line communication is seen by the administrators as a potential medium that can help to

improve the way people interact with each other and open up opportunities for the community to unite, share ideas and knowledge towards mutual benefits. However, the healthy practices that happen in the on-line medium do not mirror those in the real world. In practice, the different ways that cultural and religious systems are being performed by different groups of people become more intrusive in the off-line setting. And, since most people live off-line, the fact remains that religious and cultural practices reinforce strong bonding with the same ethnic group. In a real situation, people are dealing with each other and bonding to cultural and religious institutions, which in turn, regulate the way they interact, including those who do not share the same values and belief. By contrast, in the on-line medium, people are able to communicate and interact without seeing each other or having any physical contact. In fact, they do not need to reveal their true identities, use body language or perform any other tangible things associated with their daily life. This means that the virtual self is able to suppress differences and therefore better able to communicate across culture rather than in a real life setting.

Overall, the points being discussed here mainly relate to issues concerning Malay cultural and religious practices, rather than those of non-Malays. In Malaysia, the Malay group is normally referred to as Muslim people whereby under Article 160 of the Constitution (Constitution of Malaysia, 2009), all Malays are considered Muslim or “Islamic” by religion.¹⁹ Malay people tend to follow their cultural and religious practices more than other ethnic groups. Unlike other ethnicities, the Malays have intertwined their cultural and religious beliefs as one following the Islamic regulations. Regarding social relations, Islam has not opposed its members from making connections with those who are non-Muslims. However, some of the Islamic components that have been instituted as traditional values and norms in the Malay Muslim community for generations have physically differentiated various groups from others.

One of the issues raised by the Malay administrators which related to cultural and religious barriers was the matter of *Halal* food. Being Muslims, the Malays only eat *Halal* food, that is, food prepared in accordance with the Islamic method. Alcohol and

¹⁹ This is different from other Malay people in other countries such as in Indonesia. In Indonesia, Malay people have embraced other religions such as Hinduism or Christianity.

pork, which are common amongst non-Malays, are strictly forbidden in Islamic regulations. This includes any preparation and ingredient of cooking that could possibly involve those non-*Halal* components. Amongst everyone, the food issue is considered a very sensitive aspect in the Malay-Muslim perspective. Accordingly, the Malay administrators have asserted that food scepticism has been the factor that discourages Malays from attending social gatherings organized and presented by predominantly non-Malay members.

Living as part of a plural society, the non-Malays in Malaysia are aware of Malay-Muslim sensitivity in the *Halal* matter. At gatherings, they might cook or prepare separate food for the Malay guests and also serve non-alcoholic drinks. However, it is not enough to convince the Malay-Muslims to eat the food because they also consider how the food is prepared. For instance, they would question whether the food was cooked in the same pot that was used to cook other non-*Halal* foods or whether the same plate or other dishes have been used to serve a pork dish before.²⁰ Thus, despite being acquainted with the matter of non-*Halal* food, this is an example of how other hidden norms and values in the Malay-Muslim world may not be understood by other groups.

“I think the most important thing [which obstructs inter-ethnic interaction] is religious consideration. Chinese people may be aware of the *Halal* matter for Muslims and they [the Chinese] know that pork cannot be consumed by the Malay-Muslims. But for us, it was not enough. There are so many things about the *Halal* matter that must be taken into account such as the way the food is cooked, the other ingredients used and many more. It is very detailed and complicated!”
(V1 & V2, 2008)

Because of its sensitivity, the *Halal* issue has not only set apart the Malay-Muslims from others but in some cases the group itself has also been excluded by the non-Malays to pay respects for this group. The following quote illustrates the perception of a non-Malay administrator towards the issue:

“I met the [on-line] group [off-line]. We have hung out a few times. We have a mixture [of members] but for a dinner, most of the time we

²⁰ According to Islamic regulations, any dish which has been used to serve non-*Halal* food must be cleaned according to certain Islamic methods before it can be reused by Muslims.

do not include Muslim members, but there are [some] Indians. [The reason was] partly because of [food constraints]. Normally, among our members we [do have a session] called ‘the beers session’. It is not necessarily a dinner but just a quick drink usually [held] in a pub. So it is not suitable [to invite or include Muslim friends].”

(S1, 2008)

Other than the food issue, the administrators have noticed other things that are also considered negative in Islamic conviction such as gambling, social gatherings in a nightclub, free contact between men and women and even having pet dogs²¹. The Malay administrators believe that being in a group that shares the same attitudes, beliefs and culture can save the customs through collective reinforcement and thought.

“I think the non-Malays find it hard to get along with the Malays because we do not share the same way of thinking, the way we present ourselves and the way we make friends. We also consider the way they [the non-Malays] interact and socialize with each other. As administrators, we do not want to be responsible for organizing events for these people if they do things that oppose our culture and religious belief.”

(V1 & V2, 2008)

Overall, views by the Malay administrators emphasize that both culture and religion play an important role in identifying the Malay community in Malaysia. While it was seen as a focal factor for strengthening social relationships among Muslims, it is also considered an aspect that causes the Malay-Muslim to not get along with, or find it hard to build personal relationships with other non-Malays, particularly the non-Muslim group.²²

²¹ Dogs and pigs are two animals that are strictly forbidden in Islamic conviction. This includes touching and eating.

²² There are also non-Malay Muslim groups in Malaysia, for instance, a group of Tamil-Muslims who were originally Indian by ethnicity but Islam by religion. Another group is a converted people known as ‘Muallaf’. This group may originally be ethnically Chinese, Indian or others but have chosen Islam as their new religion particularly, when marrying Malay-Muslims.

6.7 Theme #6: The Issue of Gender

The issues of language, class, culture and religion appear as the main features that play a significant role in determining social construction in the six selected on-line communities. However, further analysis of administrators' views have indicated gender as another important element associated with the degree of participation and ethnic relations, and also contributing to part of the social issues that emerge. Administrators' views though, reflect a contradictory position when discussing the gender issue in respective on-line communities. It touches on cross-cultural variations in ideas of gender and highlights the representation of women in a virtual medium.

Since the introduction of the Internet, the issue of gender in virtual media has been widely discussed. In the Western context in particular, many past researchers have shown interest in studying how women and men related to the Internet. This includes studies related to gender gaps in cyberspace (see for example, Ono & Zavodny, 2005; Day, et al., 2005) and different perceptions of using the Internet between men and women (see for example, Hargittai & Shaffer, 2006). Despite the Internet being perceived as a pervasive part of social lives, research on gender and the Internet in Malaysia is only beginning. Attention has been focused more on the issue of a regional digital divide (Ibrahim & Hussain, 2004), e- learning and education (Salleh & Abdul Razak, 2005) and development (see for example, Mohaidin, 2000).

Gender issues in on-line communication are of importance in contemporary gender studies and sociology as they indicate changes made in both gender relations and social structures. Gendered binary views, for example, have placed women as second class citizens, indicating that "men are authoritative, rational and logical whereas, women are submissive, irrational and highly emotional" (Root Aulette, et al., 2009; p.49). According to a popular myth, the biological act of giving birth to a child has always limited women's activities, and thus, because of this limitation, woman has contributed little or nothing to the development of human society (Leavitt, 1971). Even though women play important roles in family relations and cultural maintenance, higher prestige are usually associated with masculine activities (Oakley, 1984). Accordingly, the image of women is always being surpassed by men as Willet (1971; p.512) put it:

“...men’s belief that women cannot really do big jobs, that women are not creative and that women in offices, government and industry should hold the jobs closest to housekeeping and a wife’s duties”.

The introduction of a new communication medium could potentially change these assumptions since through the on-line medium women could effectively play a role and engage in social movements towards gender equality. One aspect that may influence the development of women in social appearances and thought is the feature of on-line communication itself which promotes concealing physical and social cues. These possibilities increase the opportunity for women to participate socially and speak freely, which may lead to more equitable gender communication.

Analysis of administrators’ views in this study have suggested that some elements of gender appear to be related to, and play a part in shaping a participation decision and hence, affecting the patterns of social interaction and integration between ethnic groups. Three administrators from two on-line communities addressed the positive side of gender relations as observed in their respective communities. The other three, in contrast, shared their negative views regarding gender images and appearances.

Administrators from FamilyPlace.com and SARA perceive the existence of their respective on-line communities as beneficial to all members and argue that the communities treat female members equally in all arranged activities, on-line and off-line. Based on their personal observations, women in on-line communities were exemplified as having more opportunities to show up and take advantage of whatever programs the communities are able to offer. More importantly, on-line communities have also been claimed to function as alternative places for women who are perceptibly having problems but find it hard to share with others in “real life” circumstances. Issues such as domestic violence and disadvantages are commonly associated with women. Because most of the cases deal with the consequences of self-respect and dignity, many women were claimed to be reluctant to share their difficulties with people they know. The invisible characteristics of members in on-line communities, in contrast, may facilitate the problem, allowing them to share more effectively. Without knowing each other in person, members can still provide and receive mutual support and help. This would therefore enhance women’s courage and help to build their self-confidence in solving their problems. FamilyPlace.com, for example, claims to encourage women to

participate due to its status as a family-based community that always offers support to its female members. Therefore, this will encourage more involvement of women in the on-line community and thus, may result in more equal opportunity for ethnic interaction and integration from the perspective of gender balance.

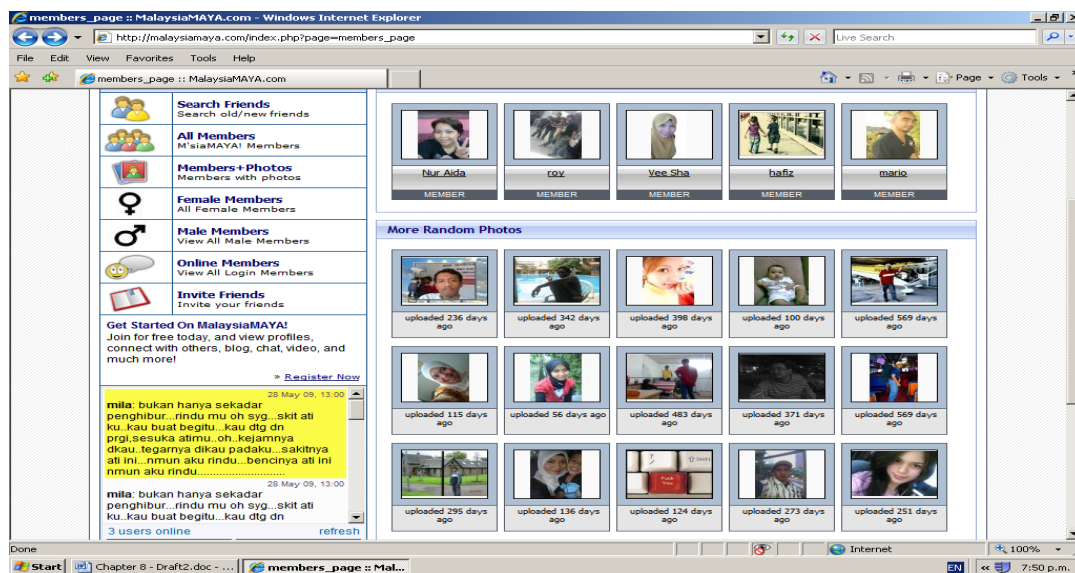
While positive views have been associated with the status of women in on-line communities as equal and motivated, the more pessimistic views find that discussing gender in on-line communities was rather challenging. The USJ administrator contended that the level of participation and support from both male and female members is more unpredictable in off-line activities rather than on-line. The administrator argues that both genders, especially female members who are married and have children, were more likely to have difficulties regarding community commitment due to domestic demands. By referring to the particular case of Malays participating in USJ off-line gatherings, the administrator's views tend to situate the attitude of Malay men and women as showing an equal role played and more family oriented, but yet, display typical stereotypes of inflexibility in order to balance between social demands and personal obligations. Hence, the question of gender in on-line communities from administrators' views suggests that the structure disparity not only occurs between men and women but is also constructed between different ethnicities.

“We did have a Malay lady [come for the off-line gatherings]. She came for everything but eventually she just decided not to come. We also have another [Malay] guy and his wife and they've got a few kids and if he comes, the wife has to stay to look after the kids. If she comes, the husband has to stay to look after the kids. And later on, they started pursuing a carrier [and] they stopped coming back. We also have families that have no problem with that.”

(U1, 2008)

Perspectives on gender in the on-line medium have drawn different views from Malay administrators. Aside from being Muslims who hold particularly strong concerns about men and women in social relationships, participation of female members in on-line communities was not an issue and has been highly encouraged. However, all three Malay administrators (V1, V2 and M1) in this study have put emphasis on the issue of visual images in their respective on-line communities. They believed that although anonymity is guaranteed, aspects of gender through various choices of images may still have a significant influence on the whole community. The images that appear in a form

of an 'avatar' or personal photo were normally used by members to identify themselves to others. The visuals presented normally reflected member's personal identity, sex characteristic or personality.



(Source: MalaysiaMAYA.com, 2009)

Figure 6.7: Members' Images on On-line Community – Extract from MalaysiaMAYA.com

Malay administrators saw the choices of individual images for female members as more crucial than for men. A study by Beasley and Standley (2002) researching images of gender on the Internet indicates that women and girls are largely invisible and their characters are normally sexualized through their clothing, behaviour and body shape. As in this current study, women, from Malay administrators' views, were claimed to be more likely to represent unacceptable self-images concerning the way they dress, act and pose, which can be considered immoral from an Islamic perspective. All three administrators agreed that such images would not be accepted and would be immediately deleted. They believe that allowing such visuals may offend other community members who disagree with such images being presented in their community. Concerning the issue of Malay domination in the VirtualFriends.net on-line community, administrators have associated the act of image control as significant to the discouragement of other ethnic groups from joining the community. Because the matter

of dress code and social poses are not such an issue for the non-Malays, the restriction made was seen as unfair and unacceptable from the views of other ethnic groups.

“Yes, we do have a filter frame to sift out kinds of nude images and also offensive photos. We have to filter out such images because it may contribute to disadvantageous influences for members’ social networks especially when they use such images for offering immoral businesses such as offering a social escort service or prostitution.”

(M1, 2008)

“We do not allow photos or images [of members] that are considered too sexy or too social. It is not permitted at all. Because the members are majority Malays [Muslim], we cannot create any unacceptable culture [which opposes the culture and belief of majority members].”

(V1 & V2, 2008)

6.8 Conclusion

The analysis suggests that the six selected on-line communities in this study show potential for enhancing social networks and enforcing social integration and social capital across all members of different ethnicities. However, these are not significant enough to create integration across all communities. Administrators’ views reflect tensions around developing social integration among inter-ethnic members in three selected on-line communities (USJ, PJNet and VirtualFriends.net), whereby on-line activities failed to translate into actual off-line communities. While the existence of on-line communities may possibly change the landscape of community practices in Malaysia, the possibilities for ethnic integration, including mutual trust and reciprocity, as advanced by Putnam (2000), are not sufficient to guarantee “social capital” through the virtual medium alone. Considering the patterns of bridging and bonding social capital, it is argued that the non-Malay groups (Chinese and Indians) have potentially benefited from bridging social capital, which at large underpins inter-ethnic social activities and information sharing. Malays, on the other hand, are more likely to engage in bonding social capital amongst themselves. For this group, on-line communities serve as a medium whereby a set of opportunities to generate durable ethnic identities and reinforce a sense of solidarity amongst their own community are found. Just as

mere contact between different ethnic groups does not automatically reduce prejudices, as proposed by the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1958), neither does on-line/off-line contact between ethnicities as illustrated in this analysis. The findings have clearly shown that the introduction of on-line communities may even increase ethnic division and prejudices due to differential policies, language barriers, culture and/or religious differences.

It is important to note here that this analysis and the findings obtained were based on the personal opinions and experiences of a relatively small group of on-line community administrators. Therefore the accuracy of the issues raised in the analysis may not necessarily be precise. The next chapter will discuss data analysis from the perspective of on-line community members and the findings will be compared with current findings to see whether different points of view exist.

Chapter 7

MEMBERS EXPERIENCES OF ON-LINE SOCIAL NETWORKING

7.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide another set of data on views and experiences of a group of 162 on-line survey participants, that is, the on-line community members. The analysis seeks to gather in-depth information of members' social backgrounds, their networking activities and socialization with other on-line ethnic communities. Analysis will be divided into six main parts. The first part uncovers the demographic structure. This includes statistical analyses on ethnic background, age, gender and other social indicators such as education level and occupation. The second part will explore on-line activities, networking trends and interests and sociability with other on-line members. Aspects of social capital, such as sharing and exchanging information, are further discussed in this section. The third part will focus on inter-ethnic integration. The analysis attempts to discover the extent of their experiences of on-line and off-line social activities with ethnic community members. These include their personal considerations when selecting and making friends on-line, decisions made about meeting on-line friends off-line and social activities with different ethnicities in both on-line and off-line circumstances. The fourth part discusses issues of class and language use in on-line communication and interaction. As already shown, language is

one of the factor that contributes to inter-ethnic disintegration and class differences. Analysis here attempts to see whether the same problems exist. The fifth part explores issues of culture and religion. Analysis seeks to discover whether these concerns, as claimed, are crucial in determining off-line socialization between Malay and non-Malay groups in the views and experiences of on-line community members. The chapter concludes with an analysis of gender. Member's on-line socialization experiences will be gathered and discussed to present insights into how on-line communities are potentially shaping social relationships across different genders in Malaysia's multi-cultural society.

7.1 Demographic Statistics

One of the most important concerns for a new exploratory study is to understand the demographic pattern of the studied population. As on-line communities are considered a recent trend in Malaysia, the characteristics of the group involved are useful for charting other related social variables and their effects. In this study, getting information about members, especially several important variables such as age, gender and ethnicity, is essential to mapping out the "new social group" which engages in on-line activity.

7.1.1 Ethnicity, Age and Gender

Table 7.1 shows that the majority of the survey respondents came from two main ethnic groups in Malaysia: Malay and Chinese. From the frequency table, Malay respondents indicated 48.8% of the total 162 participants. The number of Chinese was only slightly less than the Malays with a difference of 11 respondents or 6.8% fewer than the Malays. Other ethnicities were the least represented in the survey, with only 2.5% placing themselves in this category. Based on the additional information given, 4 respondents from the "Other" ethnic category were mostly from Eurasian backgrounds (3 of them) and 1 was European. 5.6% of the respondents were identified as of Indian ethnic background. As mentioned before (in Chapter 5), a special code of 99 was used

to replace the numbers of missing data. In this analysis, 2 or 1.2% out of the respondents chose not to disclose their ethnic identity.

Table 7.1: Ethnicity

	Frequency	Per cent (%)	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid Malay	79	48.8	48.8	48.8
Chinese	68	42.0	42.0	90.7
Indian	9	5.6	5.6	96.3
Other	4	2.5	2.5	98.8
99	2	1.2	1.2	100.0
Total	162	100.0	100.0	

There were five categories of age prepared for the purpose of the survey ranking from under 18 to 56 and above. Analysis of the variables indicates that none of the respondents involved were from the lowest age category, that is 18 and below. Figure 7.1 illustrates that the majority (48.8% or 79) of the respondents were aged between 26 and 35 years old. It is followed by those who were age 18 to 25 (29.0% or 47) and 36 to 45 years old (15.4% or 25). Only one (0.6%) respondent claimed that he/she was in the category of 56 year old and above and only a small number (6.2% or 10) of respondents were in the category of middle aged (46 to 55 years old).

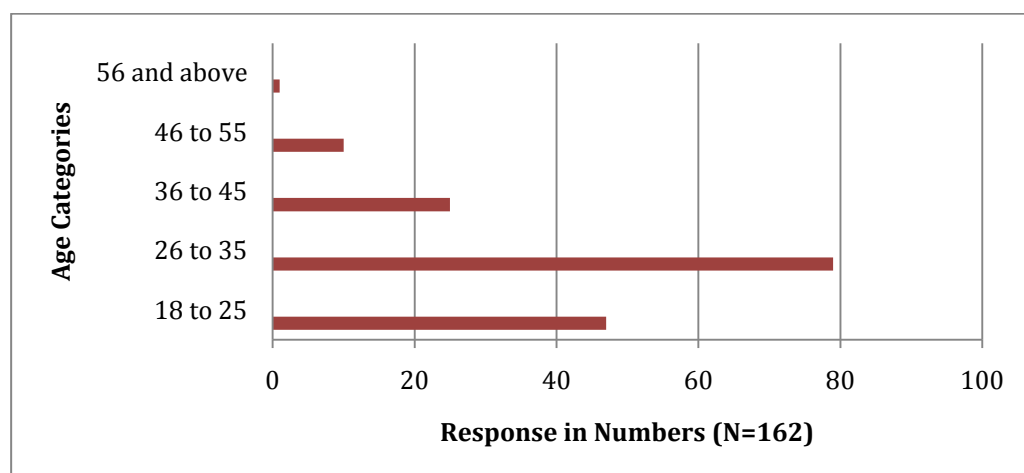


Figure 7.1: Age of Respondents

There were an approximately equal number of both genders of respondents. Figure 7.2 shows that 52.5% members were female, and 47.5% were male, only about 8 less than the female respondents.

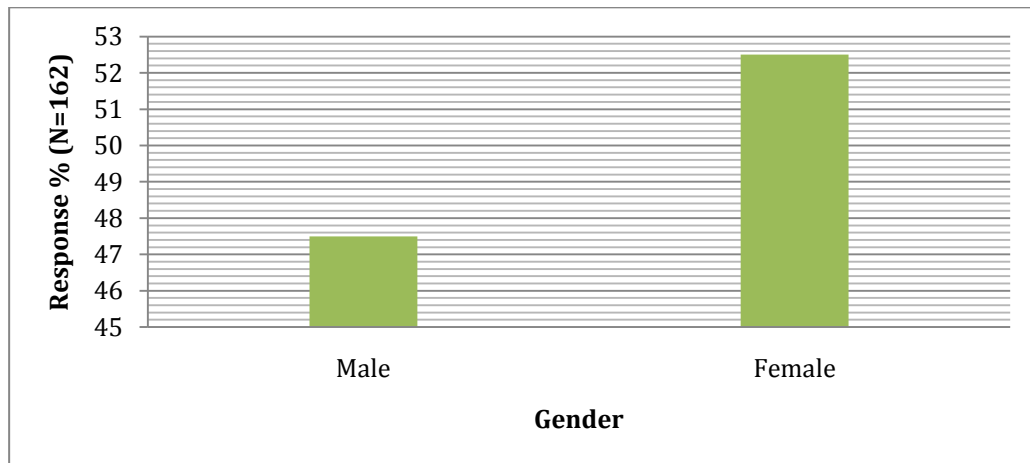


Figure 7.2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Correlation between age and ethnicity shows that the majority of members of both ethnic Malays (86%) and Chinese (75%) come from ages between 18 to 45 years old (see Table 7.2). Statistics of ethnicity and gender indicate that Malays have more female (63.3%) members than male (36.7%). On the other hand, the number of ethnic Chinese male (57.4%) members was spotted to be higher than their female (42.6%) counterparts (see Table 7.3).

Table 7.2: Ethnicity*Age

			Age					Total
			18 to 25	26 to 35	36 to 45	46 to 55	56 and above	
Ethnicity	Malay	Count	34	34	9	2	0	79
		% within Ethnicity	43.0%	43.0%	11.4%	2.5%	0.0%	100%
		% within Age	72.3%	43.0%	36.0%	20.0%	0.0%	48.8%
		% of Total	21.0%	21.0%	5.6%	1.2%	0.0%	48.8%
	Chinese	Count	13	38	13	3	1	68
		% within Ethnicity	19.1%	55.9%	19.1%	4.4%	1.5%	100%
		% within Age	27.7%	48.1%	52.0%	30.0%	100%	42.0%
		% of Total	8.0%	23.5%	8.0%	1.9%	0.6%	42.0%

	Indian	Count	0	3	2	4	0	9
		% within Ethnicity	0.0%	33.3%	22.2%	44.4%	0.0%	100%
		% within Age	0.0%	3.8%	8.0%	40.0%	0.0%	5.6%
		% of Total	0.0%	1.9%	1.2%	2.5%	0.0%	5.6%
	Other	Count	0	3	1	0	0	4
		% within Ethnicity	0.0%	33.3%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
		% within Age	0.0%	3.8%	4.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.5%
		% of Total	0.0%	1.9%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	2.5%
	99	Count	0	1	0	1	0	2
		% within Ethnicity	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	100%
		% within Age	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%	1.2%
		% of Total	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	1.2%
Total		Count	47	79	25	10	1	162
		% within Ethnicity	29.0%	48.8%	15.4%	6.2%	0.6%	100%
		% within Age	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
		% of Total	29.0%	48.8%	15.4%	6.2%	0.6%	100%

Table 7.3: Ethnicity*Gender

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Ethnicity	Malay	Count	29	50	79
		% within Ethnicity	36.7%	63.3%	100.0%
		% within Gender	37.7%	58.8%	42.0%
		% of Total	17.9%	30.9%	42.0%
	Chinese	Count	39	29	68
		% within Ethnicity	57.4%	42.6%	100.0%
		% within Gender	50.6%	34.1%	5.6%
		% of Total	24.1%	17.9%	5.6%
	Indian	Count	5	4	9
		% within Ethnicity	55.6%	44.4%	100.0%
		% within Gender	6.5%	4.7%	5.6%
		% of Total	3.1%	2.5%	5.6%
	Other	Count	2	2	4
		% within Ethnicity	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%

		% within Gender % of Total	2.6% 1.2%	2.4% 1.2%	2.5% 2.5%
	99	Count % within Ethnicity % within Gender % of Total	2 100.0% 2.6% 1.2%	0 0.0% 0.0% 0.0%	2 100.0% 1.2% 1.2%
Total		Count % within Ethnicity % within Gender % of Total	77 47.5% 100.0% 47.5%	85 52.5% 100.0% 52.5%	162 100.0% 100.0% 100.0%

7.1.2 Education Level and Occupation

Respondents were asked about their highest education level and the categories were based on the standard Malaysian education system starting from secondary to a tertiary level. There are 10 levels of education provided. More than half (58%) of the respondents claimed they hold a Bachelor degree, followed by Diploma holders (20.4%). Both the lowest level and the highest level, which is *Sijil Rendah Pelajaran Malaysia* (SRP) (Malaysian Lower Certificate) or *Penilaian Menengah Rendah*¹ (PMR) (Lower Mid Assessment) and Post Doctorates respectively, were the least represented in the survey. The other 20.4% (33) respondents claimed they hold various level of educational background ranking from *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*² (SPM) or Malaysian Certificate of Education to Post Doctoral Degree (Ph.D.) (see Figure 7.3).

¹ PMR is a Malaysian public examination taken by third form students (15-year-olds). It was formerly known as Lower Certificates of Education (LCE) and *Sijil Rendah Pelajaran* (SRP) (Wikipedia, 2009).

² SPM is a national examination taken by all fifth form students (17-year-olds) in Malaysia. It is set and examined by the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate (*Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia*)

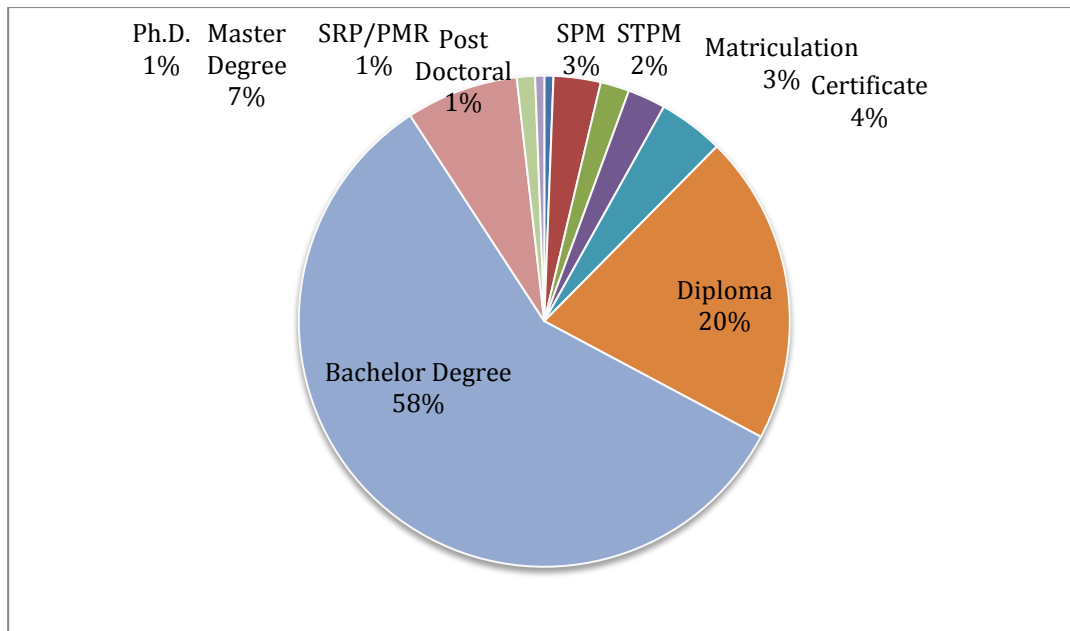


Figure 7.3: Respondents Highest Education Level

Table 7.4 below displays the occupations of the respondents. Over 50% of the respondents asserted that they worked with non-government companies (private workers). Thirteen per cent associated themselves as government servants and self-employed respectively. Eleven respondents or 6.8% of the total population claimed that they were unemployed. The number of university students was not significantly high, only representing 7.4% of the total.

Table 7.4: Respondent's Occupation

	Frequency	Per cent (%)	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid University Student	12	7.4	7.4	7.4
Government Servant	21	13.0	13.0	20.4
Private Worker	97	59.9	59.9	80.2
Self-employed	21	13.0	13.0	93.2
Unemployed	11	6.8	6.8	100.0
Total	162	100.0	100.0	

7.1.3 Location

Three out of six on-line communities selected in this study were based on non-resident communities or, in other words, they were functioning as Social Networking

Sites (SNS) communities. Therefore, it is important to signify member's locations in order to see the trends of membership distribution across the country. Over 80% of the respondents indicated that they live in a central region in Selangor state and areas surrounding Klang Valley including Kuala Lumpur. The living locations for the remaining 19.5% were dispersed geographically throughout Malaysia. 7.4% came from the southern regions (Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor), northern areas (Perlis, Kedah, Pulau Pinang and Perak) were next (6.2%), followed by the east (Pahang, Kelantan and Terengganu) (3.1%) and eastern Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak) (1.9%) accordingly (Figure 7.4). Further, more were located on the west-coast (95%) than the east-coast and east Malaysia (5%). Figure 7.5 provides a summary of demographic characteristics of members of on-line communities in this study.

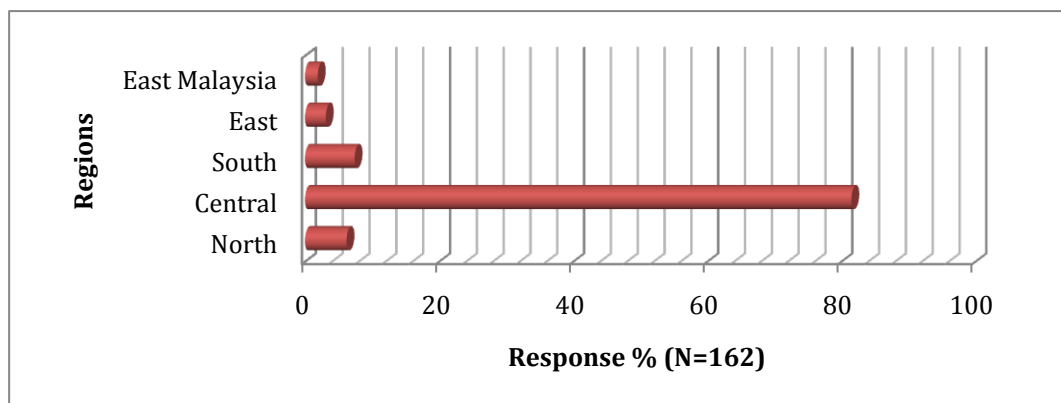


Figure 7.4: Respondent's Living Area

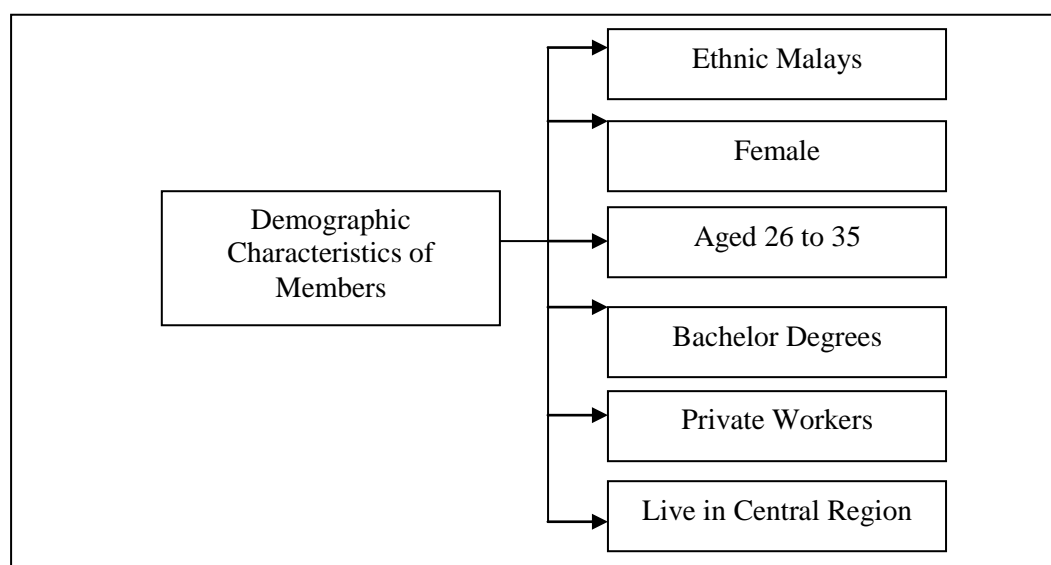


Figure 7.5: Main Characteristics of On-line Community Members

7.2 On-line Social Networks, Social Integration and Social Capital

A review of some of the Internet use and background characteristics are provided in order to get an overview of ICTs activities and experiences of the on-line community members in Malaysia. This includes the duration they connected to the Internet, places where they normally use the Internet, mode of connection, hours of surfing and frequency of accessing. Respondents were also asked about the main purpose of using and surfing the Internet to indicate the trends and importance of Internet use by Malaysians.

7.2.1 Location, Mode of Connection, Duration and Frequency of Accessing the Internet

All participants in the study claimed that they had been connected to the Internet for more than one year. This clearly shows that most of the respondents were already exposed to the Internet and its applications for quite some time. About 75.9% or 123 of 162³ said they have Internet access at home and therefore where they lived was the place for connecting to the on-line medium. There was also a high number (67.3 %) who claimed that they normally do on-line things in the office or workplace. This was followed by Wi-Fi hot spots such as public Internet kiosks, public access terminals or web pay-phones (19.8%) and in Internet cafes (16.7%). The least likely place to access the Internet was school, with only 7 claiming that they regularly access the Internet there. The survey indicated that places like the library (4.9%) and friend's houses (5.6%) were also not popular choices. Figure 7.6 below shows the top five locations used regularly by the respondents to access the Internet.

More than half (79.6%) claimed they have a broadband connection for accessing the Internet. The difference from dial-up users was relatively high where only 16.7% from the total population in the study were using this method to surf the Internet. This may reflect those who probably use the Internet only for activities such as receiving and sending e-mail, doing on-line transactions and general surfing, rather than other high-use applications such as watching streaming videos, downloading and uploading

³ This is open question where respondents are free to choose as many answers as they want to.

pictures and data and many more. 3.7% or 6 people did not know the sort of connection they used while on-line. This may be best related to those who access public Internet such as at Internet cafés, workplaces or Wi-Fi hot spots.

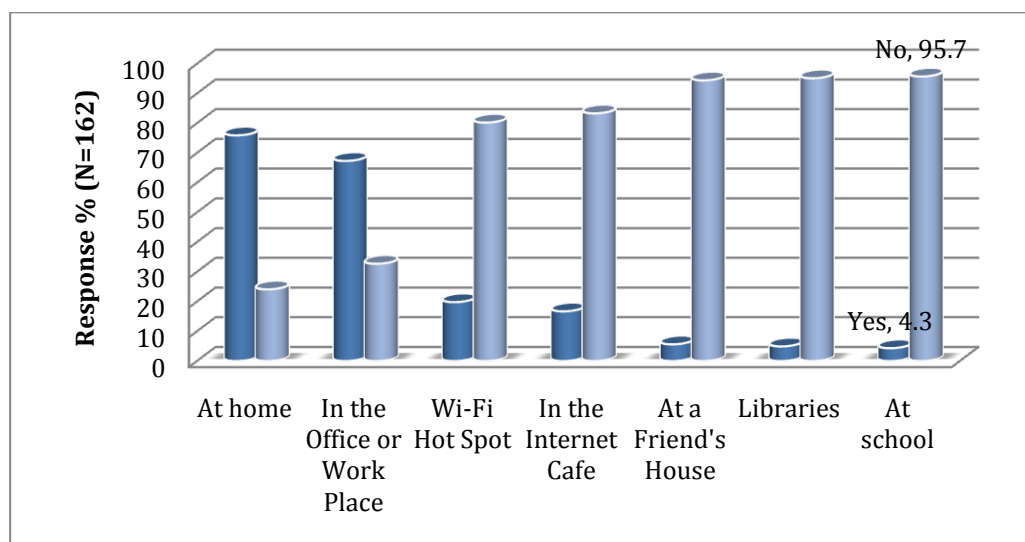


Figure 7.6: Location of Internet Access

89.5% of the on-line community members claimed that they surf the Internet every day, while the rest just do it randomly. However, the majority (95.1%) of them spend more than one hour on the Internet every time they go on-line. Figure 7.7 shows the activities the community members most do when they are in the cyber world. Seventeen (17) choices of activity that people do normally when they go on-line were provided in the survey. People were asked to select up to 10 most preferred activities they normally do. Analysis of the data found that “to search for information and knowledge” was the most popular choice of on-line activity performed. Almost all (95.1% or 154) said that they regularly use the Internet for information and knowledge searching. This is followed by “to send and receive e-mail” (93.8%) and “to communicate with others in chat rooms, forum blogs etc.” (81.5%). There were also high numbers using the Internet for on-line banking and for paying bills (74.7%). More than half (53.7%) stated that they use the Internet to create or/and become members of on-line communities. The least likely activity was to use the Internet for communicating using 3G or 4G technology through cellular phones and also activities involving “tele-working” or carrying out paid work from home. Such activities represented only 5.6% and 9.3% respectively. There were quite significant numbers who chose activities like

with on-line communications might be a reason why this group of people joined on-line communities. However, in depth questions have brought into consideration that several other reasons may have also influenced their decisions to join such communities.

Of eight reasons given, respondents were asked to select up to five “most important reasons” for joining an on-line community. The highest number (87%) chose “to gain new experience as an on-line community member” as one of their reason for participating. This is followed by “to search for and share new information and knowledge with others” (72.2%) and “to be part of a local community”⁴ (69.8%). Among all, “to expand business networks” and “to have fun” were the least choices selected by the members in this study, only accumulating 13.6% and 50% of responses respectively. There was quite an even percentage of respondents saying that they joined on-line communities to find new friends and create networks (67.3%) and to share interests with others (66.7%). 56.8% or 92 liked the idea that by joining the community they were able to provide help and get help from other people in the community.

For the status of the respondents, 88.9% (144) of those involved in the survey were ordinary community members, while only 14 of them held a position on a community core committee. There were also 4 respondents that introduced themselves as on-line community founders.

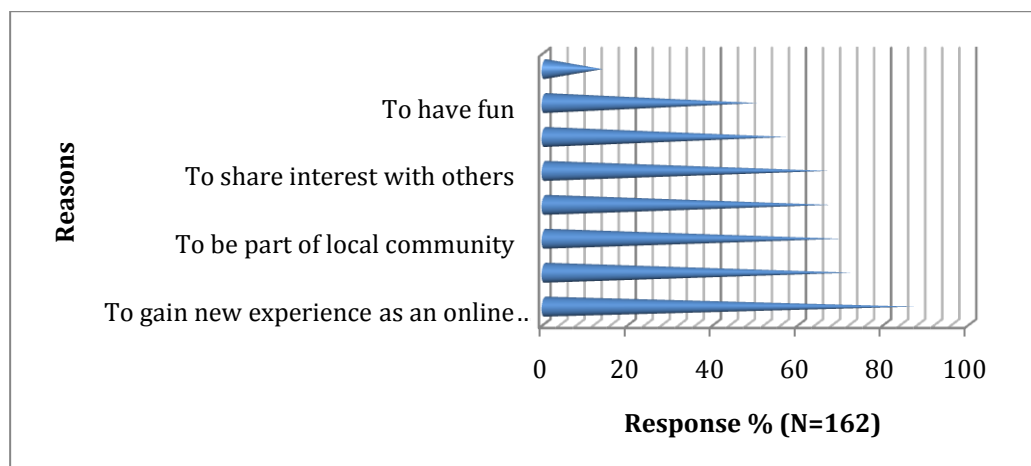


Figure 7.8: Reasons for Joining On-line Communities

⁴ This may be implied for those who were members of residential-based on-line communities.

In order to examine their commitment to the community, respondents were asked about the frequency of visits and hours spent on the community website. Analysis shows that more than half (57.4%) of on-line members in this study enter the community's website every day. About an equal percentage of them (16.7% and 16.0%) claimed that they respectively visit the community more than once a week and randomly. Only 3.1% (5) members reflect an inactive engagement to the communities they belong to in stating that they only visit the community once in a month. One member (0.6%) chose not to answer the question. More than half (53.1%) claimed that they would stay more than one hour when visiting the community's website, while others stayed less than that.

To get a clue about their tendency to become on-line community members and their enjoyment of this, respondent were asked about total numbers of other on-line communities they belong to. This included all national and overseas-based on-line communities that exist in the World Wide Web (WWW). Based on the analysis, 83.3% claimed they were a member of more than one other on-line community. Only a small percentage or 16.9% (26 out of 162) stated that the researched on-line communities were the only community they belonging to. One member chose not to answer the question.

7.2.3 Networks and Interactions On-line

Several questions were asked relating to their networking activities and attitudes towards other members. One of the variables that was considered useful to test network activities among members was to get their views about direct communication with other on-line members. Direct communication here means interactive contact through chat room or forum debate. When asked about the frequency of direct communication with on-line community members, most (47.5%) chose to answer that their frequency of communication was based on their interest or mood rather than of a regular nature. 19.1% of the total reflected on the number of truly active members. This group said they would directly communicate with other members in the community every time they enter the community website. However, almost the same percentage (17.9%) claimed that they have never chatted or have had direct communication with others. On

the other hand, 15.4% or 25 of 162 revealed that they were keen to have direct communication if they saw members they already knew on-line. This shows that on-line communities not only have the potential to expose members to new friends, but also encourages them to establish and strengthen relationships with people they have previously known.

Except for those who were not at all interested or involved in direct communication in the on-line communities, about 82.1% of the on-line community members chatted or were involved in some of the community's communication activities. Of the numbers, 33.3% (54) stated that they regularly chat with people or friends they just know. 24.7% were comfortable to communicate and interact with those people or friends they already knew and had met personally. In contrast, 16.7% showed their freer attitudes of communication when they admitted that people they chat regularly with were both their new and old friends. There was quite a high number (41 of 162) who did not answer the questions⁵. 29 of them may fall in the group who never chat on-line but the other 12 respondents were assumed to have chosen not to share their experiences about this matter.

Table 7.5: Regular Chatting

		Frequency	Per cent (%)	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	A friend I knew and met personally	40	24.7	24.7	24.7
	A friend I just know in the on-line community	54	33.3	33.3	58.0
	Both	27	16.7	16.7	74.7
	99	41	25.3	25.3	100.0
	Total	162	100.0	100.0	

Almost all (94.4%) of the on-line community members found that their on-line communities provide an easy and convenient place to communicate with each other. Only 9 of them opposed the idea and this probably applied to those who were not really interested in making connections and interacting with other members. 77.2% admitted

⁵ This is noted by code 99 in the frequency table (Table 7.5).

they have made new friends since participating in the respective communities, whilst only 22.7% (37) revealed that becoming an on-line community member did not help them expand their networks at all. The large proportion of members who successfully made new friends in the new medium of the on-line community indicated that on-line communities in Malaysia did enhance social networks because there was the possibility of different ethnicities mixing and thus making new friends. The probability of generating social integration between people is also thought to be higher. Furthermore, more than half (74.7%) of members agreed that their on-line communities are the best places to connect to people from various social and ethnic groups.

Overall responses from the survey indicate that the majority reflect positive views about the existence of the Internet and how it will help integrate people in Malaysia. For instance, about 87% of the total either agree (44.4%) or strongly agree (42.6%) with the idea that the Internet is a new and useful medium of communication that could bring people closer. Only 11.7% agree to a limited extent whilst two chose not to answer the question. There were also considerable numbers who strongly agree with the views that on-line communities encourage open discussion, expressing different views and opinions and are easy to make friends on-line. According to this on-line group, 38.9% of them agree to the same views, whilst only 11.1% agree to a limited extent.

7.2.4 Social Capital

Through the on-line survey, members were asked questions intended to reflect their attitudes and experiences of social capital within their communities. This was to examine whether social capital was generated and/or was maintained through community activities. Analysis of data indicated that the majority (85.2%) of 162 respondents sought information from other members in their communities. Only a small percentage (14.8%) of the group claimed that they had never asked for any information or questions about anything through the on-line communities they belong to. Among those who did ask, only 6.8% of the 138 respondents stated they did not get a reply about the information they asked for, whilst a large proportion (78.4%) of the group claimed they did normally get responses about the information they searched for from

other community members. Two respondents have shared their valuable experiences in this matter:

“I have shared my opinions by writing up in the online communities and other members do give their responses.”(Male)

“I made new friends and found out that people cared for each other and most people generally are polite and answered questions posted.”(Male)

Analysis of the on-line community members indicated that almost 71.6% of those who get responses from other members say that they trust the information given. Only a small number (10.5%) were sceptical about the answers they got from others, saying that they did not fully trust the information given by unknown people. Of the total population studied, 17.9% (29) chose not to answer this question. By considering the percentage of 14.4% (24) of those who never asked for anything from their communities, the other 5 (13.1% of 29) may or may not get the information they asked for, but were reluctant to share their views about information on trust in this study.

Respondents were also asked whether they ever provided any information or answered any questions posted by other members. This was to examine whether an element of reciprocity existed among on-line members in terms of information exchanged in the community. Again, there were a high number of replies (73.5%) stating that they do contribute to the community by helping people with questions and information. However, there was also quite a significant percentage (25.9%) of members (even though they are not as high as those who say “Yes”) who admitted that they never provided information to others through their on-line community. Only one member chose not to answer this question.

Apart from questions about general information, respondents were also asked for their true experiences of personal benefit when becoming on-line community members. Particular questions about business networks and work opportunities could show another significant side of on-line communities on people’s lives. More than half (70.4%) claimed that since becoming an on-line community member, their business networks were extended and some experienced huge opportunities through getting new

jobs. However, 29.6% of the research population described themselves as group of non-beneficiaries in terms of business networks and work opportunities.

Based on the data analysis, it is argued that the six on-line communities in this study do provide a medium for generating and maintaining social capital. On-line members reflect a positive attitude towards knowledge and information sharing with other community members when almost all respondents (98.8%) show their agreement with the idea. A number of them have also highlighted this as valuable experiences:

“Being an on-line community has shown me that there are so many helpful people around who would not think twice in giving good advice and information to unknown individuals, who they may have not met before. There is a wealth of knowledge and experiences that can be gained.” (Male)

“We regularly discuss community security and setting up of a security back-lane gate, organizing ‘qurban’ and social activities for Muslims in mosque.” (Male)

“I got so much information about a medical condition that I find myself seems more informed about the condition than a doctor.” (Female)

I have gained a lot of information and knowledge with no cost and got new friends as well.” (Male)

These high responses for knowledge and information exchange and the ability to trust each other in on-line communication indicates that the culture of virtual interaction and sharing things through the on-line medium increasingly takes place in the Eastern cultural community of Malaysia. This kind of behaviour, referred by Sproull and colleagues (2005) as “prosocial behavior” defined as “voluntary intentional behaviour that results in benefits for another” (p.139), could help to demolish the sentiments of chauvinism among Malaysia’s multi-cultures, at least amongst on-line groups. According to Sproull et al. (2005), physical appearance plays an important role in influencing people’s actions to seek or give help. They suggested that “in the on-line world, people reading a request for help have no information about the requestor’s physical appearance or social similarity that is conveyed by visible attributes such as age, gender or race” (p.143). Even though this advantage may be applied to those who are on-line community members, it is argued that the trend will grow and could slowly

take place in the off-line community. It is hoped that someday the value they hold in the on-line medium could be presented in the real world. The two following statements by participants might help confirm this argument:

“I met many people through this on-line community, we sharing opinion and mostly, I can generate new ideas from their opinion and part of them now became my best friends which I really trust.”
(Female)

“Since I became an on-line community member, I found it is easier to get to know my neighbours and understand them better as sometimes expressing in words could be easier than talking out face to face. Other than that, I could get to know a lot of information about the community as well as the place we live in. In addition to that, I am able to know some members who are actually from the same hometown which I never come across that I will know them.” (Male)

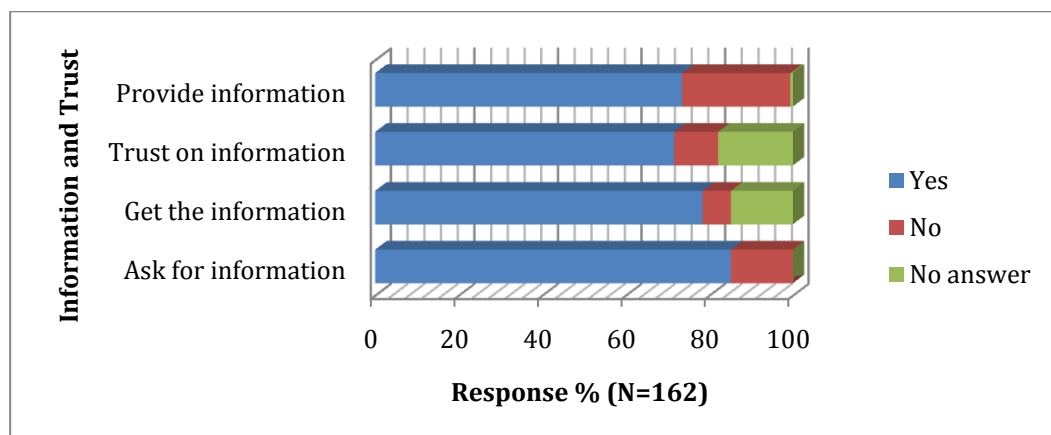


Figure 7.9: Information and Trust

7.3 Ethnic Integration

7.3.1 On-line and Off-line Communication

Analysis of data has been run across several variables related to respondents' views and experiences of relationship with other ethnic members who participated in the on-line communities. Firstly, the analysis intended to find the percentage of on-line members who made friends through on-line activities. This was followed by examining

relationships between groups and their actions concerning interaction and communication off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line; levels of social activities; and their views about the importance of ethnic status in the on-line communities in which they participated. All analyses involved correlation and Chi-square tests to compare the frequencies observed in certain categories (for example ethnicities) to the expected frequencies (for example off-line communication) in those categories (Fielding, 2008).

7.3.1.1 Making Friends On-line

Table 7.6 shows the relationship between the two variables; ethnicity and making friends through on-line communities. The results indicated from the total of 77.2% of 125 who said that they did make friends in this way, 58.4% (73) of these were Malays and 40% (50) were non-Malays. Two respondents (1.6%) from unknown ethnic backgrounds have also claimed they do have friends they met on-line. 22.8% (37) admitted they did not make any friends since joining the on-line communities. Of those who did not, the majority of them were non-Malays (83.8%), whilst the rest were Malays.

In summary, the table shows by ethnicity that the Malays were most likely to make friends with on-line members rather than non-Malays. We can also see that among the Malays themselves, the difference between those who do have (92.4%) friends and who do not (7.6%) was also high (84.8%). On the other hand, non-Malays show a smaller difference (23.4%) among those who “do have” and “do not have” friends (61.7% to 38.3%). Because the total number of Malay participants (79) and non-Malays (81) was not so different (even the number of Malay respondents was lower than the non-Malays), it is possible to say that the non-Malay group was less friendly compared to the Malay group in terms of on-line friendship.

Table 7.6: Ethnicity*Making Friends On-line

			Ethnicity			Total
			Malay	Non-Malay	99	
Have you made friends since participating?	Yes	Count	73	50	2	125
		Expected Count	61.0	62.5	1.5	125.0
		% within Have you made friends since participating?	58.4%	40.0%	1.6%	100.0%
		% within Ethnicities	92.4%	61.7%	100.0%	77.2%
		% of Total	45.1%	30.9%	1.2%	77.2%
	No	Count	6	31	0	37
		Expected Count	18.0	18.5	.5	37.0
		% within Have you made friends since participating?	16.2%	83.8%	.0	100.0%
		% within Ethnicities	7.6%	38.3%	.0%	22.8%
		% of Total	3.7%	19.1%	.0%	22.8%
Total	Count	79	81	2	162	
	Expected Count	79.0	81.0	2.0	162.0	
	% within Have you made friends since participating?	48.8%	50.0%	1.2%	100.0%	
	% within Ethnicities	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	48.8%	50.0%	1.2%	100.0%	

A Chi-square test was then run to examine whether there is an association between the two categorical variables (in this case ethnicity and making friends on-line)⁶. Based on Table 7.7, the value of Chi-square statistics for this test is 21.956. This value is highly significant ($p < .005$), indicating that respondents with different ethnic backgrounds had a significantly different experience in making friends on-line. The results indicate that there is an association between ethnic group and having on-line friends.

⁶ Chi-square statistics test whether the two variables are independent. If the significant value is small enough (conventionally significant values must be less than .05) then we reject the hypothesis that the variables are independent and accept the hypothesis that they are in some way related. The value of the Chi-square statistic is given in the table (and the degree of freedom) as is the significant value.

Table 7.7: Chi-Square Test-Ethnicity*Making Friends On-line

	Value	df	Asymp.Sig. (2-sided)
Chi-Square	21.956 ^a	2	.000
Likelihood Ratio	23.839	2	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.312	1	.576
N of Valid Cases	162		

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .46.

7.3.1.2 On-line Meetings and Off-line Gatherings

The analysis aimed to look at the relationship between ethnicity and interacting and communicating in a real life with friends met through on-line communities⁷. The results reveal that there were considerably more people who claim they do interact and communicate off-line with friends they make on-line (69.8%) compared to those who did not (30.2%) (Table 7.8). Of the total who said “they do” (113), 57.5% (65) are ethnic Malays and the others 46.7% (46) are from non-Malay groups. Two respondents (1.85%) who concealed their ethnicities have also claimed they do have friend made on-line and regularly make contact with them in a real setting. Of those who did not, the majority of them came from non-Malay backgrounds (71.4%) whilst the rest (28.6%) are Malays. In summary, the table shows that the Malays were most likely to meet their on-line multi-ethnic friends off-line, whilst the non-Malays show lower interest in meeting friends outside of their ethnic groups off-line.

The Chi-square test confirmed the association between the two categorical variables (in this case ethnicity and whether interaction and communication occurred off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line). Based on Table 7.9, the value of Chi-square statistic for this test is 19.129. This value is highly significant ($p < .005$), indicating that different groups of ethnicities of respondents had a significantly different experience in face-to-face meetings with their multi-ethnic friends made on-line.

⁷ This refers to the six selected on-line communities in this study.

Table 7.8 Ethnicity*Interact and Communicate Off-line with Multi-ethnic Friends Made On-line

			Ethnicity			Total
			Malay	Non-Malay	99	
Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?	Yes	Count	65	46	2	113
		Expected Count	55.1	56.5	1.4	113.0
		% within Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?	57.5%	40.7%	1.8%	100.0%
		% within Ethnicities	82.3%	56.8%	100.0%	69.8%
		% of Total	40.1%	28.4%	1.2%	69.8%
	No	Count	14	35	0	49
		Expected Count	23.9	24.5	.6	49.0
		% within Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?	28.6%	71.4%	.0	100.0%
		% within Ethnicities	17.7%	43.2%	.0%	30.2%
		% of Total	8.6%	21.6%	.0%	30.2%
		Count	79	81	2	162
		Expected Count	79.0	81.0	2.0	162.0
		% within Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?	48.8%	50.0%	1.2%	100.0%
		% within Ethnicities	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	48.8%	50.0%	1.2%	100.0%

Table 7.9: Chi-Square Test-Ethnicity*Interact and Communicate Off-line with Multi-ethnic Friends Made On-line

	Value	df	Asymp.Sig. (2-sided)
Chi-Square	13.193 ^a	2	.001
Likelihood Ratio	13.993	2	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	.596	1	.440
N of Valid Cases	162		

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .60.

7.3.1.3 Social Activities with Multi-ethnic Groups

Respondents were also asked about the impact of joining their on-line communities for social activities with people from other ethnicities. This is to show which group of ethnicities developed social relationships with others since becoming on-line community members. Based on the analysis, 100 of 162 (61.7%) respondents involved in this study asserted that they had experienced more social connections with people from different backgrounds since joining. On the other hand, 61 respondents admitted that their social lives and relationships with other ethnicities had not really changed. Of those who said “Yes” to the change, Malay respondents once again represented a greater number (59%) than non-Malays (39%). In the total of 61 who said “No change”, 68.9% were from non-Malay groups whilst the rest were Malay. The correlations tell us that since participating in on-line communities, respondents from Malay ethnic backgrounds experienced greater engagement in social activities with people from other ethnics than non-Malay groups (see Table 7.10).

The Chi-square test (see Table 7.11) shows a significance value ($r = 15.065$) ($p \leq .005$) indicating that ethnicity was again important in increasing social activities with multi-ethnic friends as a result of on-line participation. The results indicate that there is an association between a person’s ethnicity and the level of social activities with people from other-ethnic groups. Participation in on-line communities for non-Malay groups, in contrast, did not have much impact on their levels of social relationships with other ethnic groups.

Table 7.10 Ethnicity*Have Your Social Activities With People from Other Ethnicities Increased Since Participation?

			Ethnicities			Total
			Malay	Non-Malay	99	
Have your social activities with people from other ethnicities increased since participated?	Yes	Count	59	39	2	100
		Expected Count	48.8	50.0	1.2	100.0
		% within Have your social activities with people from other ethnicities increased since participated?	59.0%	39.0%	2.0%	100.0%
		% within Ethnicities	74.7%	48.1%	100.0%	61.7%

	% of Total	36.4%	24.1%	1.2%	61.7%
No	Count	19	42	0	61
	Expected Count	29.7	30.5	.8	61.0
	% within Have your social activities with people from other ethnicities increased since participated?	31.1%	68.9%	.0	100.0%
	% within Ethnicities	24.1%	51.9%	.0%	37.7%
	% of Total	11.7%	25.9%	.0%	37.7%
99	Count	1	0	0	1
	Expected Count	.5	.5	.0	1.0
	% within Have your social activities with people from other ethnicities increased since participated?	100.0%	.0%		100.0%
	% within Ethnicities	1.3%	.0%	.0%	.6%
	% of Total	.6%	.0%	.0%	.6%
Total	Count	79	81	2	162
	Expected Count	79.0	81.0	2.0	162.0
	% within Have your social activities with people from other ethnicities increased since participated?	48.8%	50.0%	1.2%	100.0%
	% within Ethnicities	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	48.8%	50.0%	1.2%	100.0%

Table 7.11: Chi-Square Test-Ethnicity* Have Your Social Activities With People from Other Ethnicities Increased Since Participation?

	Value	df	Asymp.Sig. (2-sided)
Chi-Square	15.065 ^a	4	.005
Likelihood Ratio	16.307	4	.003
Linear-by-Linear Association	.048	1	.827
N of Valid Cases	162		

a. 5 cells (55.6%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .01.

7.3.1.4 The Importance of Ethnic Identity

Besides asking about communication experiences with multi-ethnic friends on-line and also off-line, people were asked about their views concerning the importance of other members' ethnicities. This question may be different to viewers as it may not be possible to recognize people's ethnic identity in virtual communication. However, the question was designed to see how aware people were of their on-line members' identities and background (age, gender and race) based on criteria they might be familiar with, such as language used, nick names or topics discussed.

All respondents answered the question with a majority, 63.6% (103 of 162), of them saying that ethnicity is not important at all to them. The other 25.9% (42), on the other hand, claimed that knowing other members' ethnicities is important for them before they can continue communicating or interacting with the person on-line. The rest 10.5% (17) chose to say "not sure" whether ethnicity is important or not. In terms of who said the ethnicity of the members they communicate with is not important for them, more than half (52.4%) came from the non-Malay group. For those who indicated ethnicity was important the number of non-Malays is notably a little higher than Malays with 21% and 20.5% respectively. For those who were not sure about the issue, the Malay responses were much higher (64.7%) than the non-Malays (35.3%) with a difference of 29.4% or 5 respondents. The correlation indicated that both ethnic groups overall supported the view that a member's ethnic background when communicating in on-line communities was not important (see Table 7.12).

However, the Chi Squared test for the analysis shows a non significant figure ($r = 2.968$; $p > .005$) (see Table 7.13). This suggests that views about the importance of ethnicity of on-line members were not significantly related to respondents' ethnic backgrounds.

Table 7.12 Ethnicity*Do You Think Ethnicity Is Important When You Communicate In An On-line Community?

			Ethnicities			Total
			Malay	Non-Malay	99	
Do you think ethnicity is important	Yes	Count	20	22	0	42
		Expected Count	20.5	21.0	.5	42.0
		% within Do you	47.6%	52.4%	.0%	100.0%

when you communicate in on-line community?	think ethnicity is important when you communicate in on-line community?				
		% within Ethnicities	25.3%	27.2%	.0%
	% of Total	12.3%	13.6%	.0%	25.9%
No	Count	48	53	2	103
	Expected Count	50.2	51.5	1.3	103.0
	% within Do you think ethnicity is important when you communicate in on-line community?	46.6%	51.5%	1.9	100.0%
	% within Ethnicities	60.8%	65.4%	100.0%	63.6%
	% of Total	29.6%	32.7%	1.2%	63.6%
Not Sure	Count	11	6	0	17
	Expected Count	8.3	8.5	.2	17.0
	% within Do you think ethnicity is important when you communicate in on-line community?	64.7%	35.3%	.0%	100.0%
	% within Ethnicities	13.9%	7.4%	.0%	10.5%
	% of Total	6.8%	3.7%	.0%	10.5%
Total	Count	79	81	2	162
	Expected Count	79.0	81.0	2.0	162.0
	% within Do you think ethnicity is important when you communicate in on-line community?	48.8%	50.0%	1.2%	100.0%
	% within Ethnicities	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	48.8%	50.0%	1.2%	100.0%

Table 7.13: Chi-Squared Test-Ethnicity* Have Your Social Activities With People from Other Ethnicities Increased Since Participation?

	Value	df	Asymp.Sig. (2-sided)
Chi-Square	2.968 ^a	4	.563
Likelihood Ratio	3.636	4	.457
Linear-by-Linear Association	.111	1	.739
N of Valid Cases	162		

a. 3 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .21.

7.4 Language Used and Ethnicity

The analysis will continue to use the two groups: Malays and non-Malays. Five categories with respect to language were used in the analysis. These are: 1) Malay; 2) English; 3) Chinese; 4) Malay and English and 5) Chinese and English. Selection of the language categories was based on responses from the survey participants.⁸ For the main language used in the six selected on-line communities in this study, English was notably the most popular. About 53.1% of the respondents claimed that they normally communicate using the English language in the on-line medium. Second highest was a combination of Malay and English with 24.1% responses. The least used was the Chinese language, which accumulated only 1.9% or 3 users out of 162. The Malay language alone had only 17.9% users. The last category, that is Chinese and English, had only 3.1%. From these results, English is clearly the most common language used for on-line communication in Malaysian on-line communities, and, solely Malay language users were much lower than those who used a mix of Malay and English.

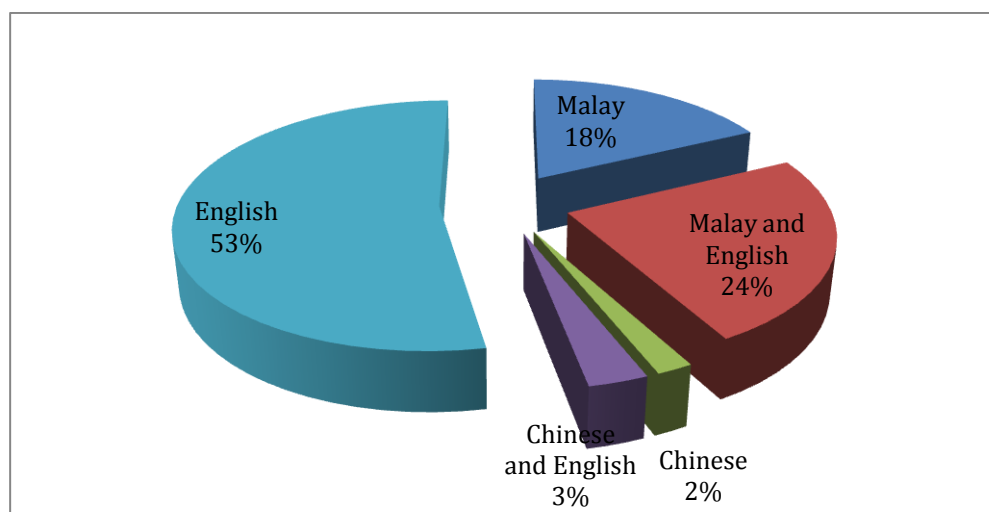


Figure 7.10: Language Used Amongst On-line Community Members

Correlation between language use and ethnicity has provided quietly interesting findings. Within of the 79 Malay respondents participating in the survey, almost half of them (44.3%) said they speak both Malay and English when communicating in an on-

⁸ Eight categories of languages used were prepared for the purpose of the survey (Malay; Malay and Chinese; Malay and English; Malay, Chinese and English; Chinese; Chinese and English, English and other). However, only 5 responses were collected and thus used for the analysis.

line community. This is followed by those who only use the Malay language (36.7%) and those who only use English (19%). None of the Malay respondents in the survey stated that they ever using other languages such as Chinese or Tamil. For the non-Malays, the majority (86.4%) communicate in on-line communities in English. Only 4.9% (or 4 out of 81) claimed they used both Malay and English in conversation. 6.2% said they used Chinese and English and 2.5% used only the Chinese language. None of them, though, claimed they ever use solely Malay language for communicating with others. Within language itself, it shows that the Malay language is only being used by ethnic Malays (100%). The majority (89.7%) of the Malay members used both Malay and English languages, compared to only a small proportion of the non-Malays who used the same category (10.3%). For the English language, the number of non-Malay users was noticeably far higher (81.4%) than the Malays (17.4%). For solely Chinese language and a combination of Chinese and English languages, both were dominated by the non-Malay members (Chinese – 66.7%; Chinese and English – 100%) with a relatively small percentage of users for these respective categories compared to other languages.

A Chi-squared test was then run to examine the association between the two categorical variables (in this case ethnicity and language used). Based on Table 7.15, the Chi-squared value for this test is 122.627. This value is highly significant ($p < .005$), indicating that respondents with different ethnic backgrounds had a significantly different choice of language used while communicating in an on-line community. A Chi-squared test for goodness of fit⁹ confirms this result.

Table 7.14 Ethnicity*Language Used

			Ethnicity			Total
			Malay	Non-Malay	99	
Language Used	Malay	Count	29	0	0	29
		Expected Count	14.1	14.5	.4	29.0
		%within Language used	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
		%within Ethnicities	36.7%	.0%	.0%	17.9%
		% of Total	17.9%	.0%	.0%	17.9%
	Malay &	Count	35	4	0	39

⁹ The Chi-square test for goodness of fit applies to the analysis of a single categorical variable (Coakes, 2005).

English	Expected Count	19.0	19.5	.5	39.0
	%within	89.7%	10.3%	.0%	100.0%
	Language used				
	%within	44.3%	4.9%	.0%	24.1%
	Ethnicities				
	% of Total	21.6%	2.5%	.0%	24.1%
	Chinese				
	Count	0	2	1	3
	Expected Count	1.5	1.5	.0	3.0
	%within	.0%	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
	Language used				
	%within	.0%	2.5%	50.0%	1.9%
	Ethnicities				
	% of Total	.0%	1.2%	.6%	1.9%
	Chinese & English				
	Count	0	5	0	5
	Expected Count	2.4	2.5	.1	5.0
	%within	.0%	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
	Language used				
	%within	.0%	6.2%	.0%	3.1%
	Ethnicities				
	% of Total	.0%	3.1%	.0%	3.1%
	English				
	Count	15	70	1	86
	Expected Count	41.9	43.0	1.1	86.0
	%within	17.4%	81.4%	1.2%	100.0%
	Language used				
	%within	19.0%	86.4%	50.0%	53.1%
	Ethnicities				
	% of Total	9.3%	43.2%	.6%	53.1%
Total	Count	79	81	2	162
	Expected Count	79.0	81.0	2.0	162.0
	%within	48.8%	50.0%	1.2%	100.0%
	Language used				
	%within	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Ethnicities				
	% of Total	48.8%	50.0%	1.2%	100.0%

Table 7.15: Chi-Squared Test-Ethnicity* Language Used

	Value	df	Asymp.Sig. (2-sided)
Chi-Square	122.627 ^a	8	.000
Likelihood Ratio	123.606	8	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.917	1	.338
N of Valid Cases	162		

a. 9 cells (60.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .04.

Table 7.16: Chi-Squared Test for Goodness of Fit – Language Used in On-line Communities

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Malay	29	32.4	-3.4
Malay and English	39	32.4	6.6
Chinese	3	32.4	-29.4
Chinese and English	5	32.4	-27.4
English	86	32.4	53.6
Total	162		

Table 7.17: Test Statistics

	Language Used
Chi-Square ^a	140.222
df	4
Asymp.Sig.	.000

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 32.4.

7.4.1 Language Used and Inter-ethnic Communication

Further analysis of the relationship between language use and inter-ethnic communication off-line has been done to explore whether this may influence the amount of interaction and integration between ethnic groups. The analysis shows that among 113 respondents who said “Yes” for interaction and communication off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line, 78.8% of them used non-Malay languages or at least a combination of Malay and English. In comparison, only 21.2% of Malay language speakers show the same use. However, correlation results found that among those who only speak Malay for communication on-line, the numbers who made friends were higher (82.8 %) than those who do not (17.2%). This indicated that among those who made friends on-line and do meet their multi-ethnic on-line friends off-line, the majority are those who can speak languages other than Malay. This could be a combination of Malay and English, or merely English, Chinese or Chinese and English. Yet, it is hard to say that members who communicate in Malay are not able to make friends with others because of the language they use. This is because the correlation has proven that within the Malay group, a majority claimed that they do make friends on-line and do communicate with them off-line. The Chi-Squared test supports this

situation by giving insignificant value ($\chi^2(1) = 2.832, p > .005$), which suggests that there was no significant relationship between language used and the likelihood of communication with multi-ethnic friends on-line and off-line.

Regarding the analysis, it is obvious that different language use has not significantly influenced social relationships between ethnicity in the selected on-line communities. However, the results may suggest that members who can speak various languages are benefited more in terms of making friends and having relationships with others from outside of their ethnic backgrounds, since the majority of non-Malays are obviously comfortable using the English language for everyday conversation. Consider one of the respondents who clearly reflect this idea:

“Interacting with different ethnicities on-line has giving me confidence in communicating and making friends to different ethnicities off-line. When we communicate with different ethnic people, we keen on interacting and having a conversation in English. Thus, it helps enhance our English communication skill and gives us more confidence in communicating with other friends from different ethnicity in the future.”(Malay, Male)

Table 7.18 Language Used*Interaction and Communication Off-line with Multi-ethnic Friends Made On-line

			Language Used		Total
			Malay Language	Other Languages	
Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?	Yes	Count	24	89	113
		Expected Count	20.2	92.8	113.0
		% within Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?	21.1%	78.8%	100.0%
		% within Language Used	82.8%	66.9%	69.8%
	No	% of Total	14.8%	59.4%	69.8%
		Count	5	44	49
		Expected Count	8.8	40.2	49.0
		% within Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?	10.2%	89.8%	100.0%

	% within Language Used	17.2%	33.1%	30.2%
	% of Total	3.1%	27.2%	30.2%
Total	Count	29	133	162
	Expected Count	29.0	133.0	162.0
	% within Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?	17.9%	82.1%	100.0%
	% within Language Used	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	17.9%	82.1%	100.0%

Table 7.19: Chi-Squared Test-Language Used*Interact and Communication Off-line with Multi-ethnic Friends Made On-line

	Value	df	Asymp.Sig. (1-sided)
Chi-Square	2.832 ^b	1	.068
Likelihood Ratio	3.084	1	.068
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.814 ^c	1	.068
N of Valid Cases	162		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.77.

c. The standardized statistic is 1.678

7.4.2 Ethnic Group, Language Used and Meeting On-line Friends Off-line

The two previous analyses have looked at two way interactions between two particular variables. This section attempts to see interactions between three categorical variables; ethnic groups, language used and whether they interact and communicate off-line with their multi-ethnic friends made on-line. In other words, this current analysis seeks to compare patterns of language used and their experiences on inter-ethnic interaction between Malay and non-Malay groups. A statistical technique called Loglinear analysis¹⁰ has been chosen to perform the test (see Appendix 7A for more description of Loglinear analysis).

¹⁰ Loglinear analysis is an extension of the Chi-squared test specially developed to analyse more complex contingency tables in which there are three or more variables involved. In non-parametric analysis, Loglinear analysis can be expressed as a regression model (Fielding, 2008).

It is essential to do a normal correlation for the selected variables before the analysis can be run. Cross-tabulation tables produced by SPSS, as in Table 7.20, contain the number of cases that fall into each combination of categories. The top half of this table shows the summary about the Malay group and their relationship with language use and inter-ethnic relations between the members. The correlation shows that in total 82.3% (65) of Malay members who claimed that they have interacted and communicated off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line, 63.1% (41) use languages other than Malay for communication and 36.9% (24) use only Malay. 17.7% (14) did not have contact with multi-ethnic friends at all, and of those who fall in this category, 64.3% (9) were using other languages and 35.7% (5) others used solely the Malay language.

For the non-Malay group, it was shown that 56.8% (46 of 81 members) noticeably had interactions off-line with their friends made on-line. Of the total, 100% (46 of 46 members) of those who did interact were using language other than Malay for on-line communication. 43.2% (or 35 of 81) claimed they did not have any relationships off-line with friends they made on-line. From this number, none of them were using the Malay language for communication. Instead they used other languages, especially English and Chinese.

In summary, more Malay members in this study claimed that they have interacted with multi-ethnic members off-line than their non-Malays counterpart. More than half (63.3%) of the Malay respondents used other languages for communication compared to only the Malay language (36.7%). However, both Malay language users (82.8%) and other language users (82.0%) show the same percentage in terms of off-line relationship. On the other hand, the non-Malay group show a balanced number of those who did and did not interact with all the respondents who used other languages for communication.

Table 7.20: Ethnicities*Language Used*Interaction and Communication Off-line with Multi-ethnic Friends Made On-line

Ethnic Group				Language Used		Total
				Malay	Other Languages	
Malay	Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?	Yes	Count	24	41	65
			Expected Count	23.9	41.1	65.0
			% within Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?	36.9%	63.1%	100.0%
			% within Language Used	82.8%	82.0%	82.3%
			% of Total	30.4%	51.9%	82.3%
		No	Count	5	9	14
			Expected Count	5.1	8.9	14.0
			% within Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?	35.7%	64.3%	100.0%
			% within Language Used	17.2%	18.0%	17.7%
			% of Total	6.3%	11.4%	17.7%
	Total		Count	29	50	79
			Expected Count	29.0	50.0	79.0
			% within Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?	36.7%	63.3%	100.0%
			% within Language Used	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
			% of Total	36.7%	63.3%	100.0%
Non-Malay	Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?	Yes	Count		46	46
			Expected Count		46.0	46.0
			% within Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?		100.0%	100.0%
			% within Language Used		56.8%	56.8%
			% of Total		56.8%	56.8%
		No	Count		35	35
			Expected Count		35.0	35.0
			% within Do you		100.0%	100.0%

	interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?			
	% within Language Used		43.2%	43.2%
	% of Total		43.2%	43.2%
Total	Count		81	81
	Expected Count		81.0	81.0
	% within Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?		100.0%	100.0%
	% within Language Used		100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total		100.0%	100.0%

SPSS Output in Table 7.21 shows the initial output from the Loglinear analysis for the three test-variables (see complete steps in Appendix 7A). Loglinear analysis indicates that there is no significance between three variables in the test, they are; ethnicity of the respondents, language they used for on-line communication and whether they have interacted and communicated off-line with multi-ethnic friends they met on-line. This is because one of the three subsidiary interactions was not significantly related. The results only found a relation between ethnic groups and language they used in on-line communication and also between ethnic groups and interaction with multi-ethnic friends. This result actually repeated the single test analysis as performed in 7.3.1.2 (Ethnicity*Interaction) and in 7.4.1 (Ethnicity*Language). No significant relationship in Language*Interaction has already been proven in the analysis of 7.4.2. By having a non-significant relationship between ethnic groups, their language used and inter-ethnic relationships off-line in this analysis, it can be concluded that previous arguments made by administrators about integration tendencies between Malay and non-Malay communities because of language used may not necessarily acceptable.

Table 7.21: SPSS Output for Loglinear Analysis

***** HIERARCHICAL LOGLINEAR*****						
Backward Elimination (p = .050) for DESIGN 1 with generating class						
ETHNICITY*LANGUAGE ETHNICITY*INTERACT						
Likelihood Ration chi-square = .00000 DF = 0 P = -INF						
If deleted simple effect is		DF	L.R	Chisq	Change	Iter
		Prob				
ETHNICITY*LANGUAGE		7	155.179			0
		.0000				
ETHNICITY*INTERACT		4	60.132			2
		.0000				
Step 3						
The best model has generating class						
ETHNICITY*LANGUAGE ETHNICITY*INTERACT						
Likelihood ratio chi square = .00000 DF = 0 P = -INF						
The final model has generating class						
ETHNICITY*LANGUAGE ETHNICITY*INTERACT						
The Iterative Proportional Fit algorithm converged at iteration 0. The maximum difference between observed and fitted marginal total is .000 and the convergence criterion is .250						
Observed, Expected Frequencies and Residuals						
Factor		Code	OBS Count	EXP Count	Residual	Std Residual
ETHNICITY	Malay					
LANGUAGE		MALAY				
INTERACT		Yes	24.0	23.9	.139	.029
INTERACT		No	5.0	5.1	-.139	-.061
LANGUAGE		Other				
		Languages				
INTERACT		Yes	41.0	41.1	-.139	-.022
INTERACT		No	9.0	8.9	.139	.047
ETHNICITY	Non-Malay					
LANGUAGE		Malay				
INTERACT		Yes	.000	.000	.000	.000

INTERACT LANGUAGE	No	.000	.000	.000	.000
	Other Languages				
INTERACT	Yes	46.0	46.0	.000	.000
INTERACT	No	35.0	35.5	.000	.000

Goodness-of-fit test statistics					
Likelihood ratio chi-square	= .007	DF = 2	P = .996		
Chi square	= .007	DF = 2	P = .996		

Figure 7.10 shows a summary of the relationship between the three variables. It clearly shows that both ethnic groups favour other languages in on-line and off-line communication with their multi-ethnic friends. It also shows that the number of those who interact with each other is higher than who did not in both ethnic groups. However, the obvious difference is that none of the members of the non-Malay group used the Malay language for communication compared to the Malay group, which shows relatively equal use in both categories of language for communication.

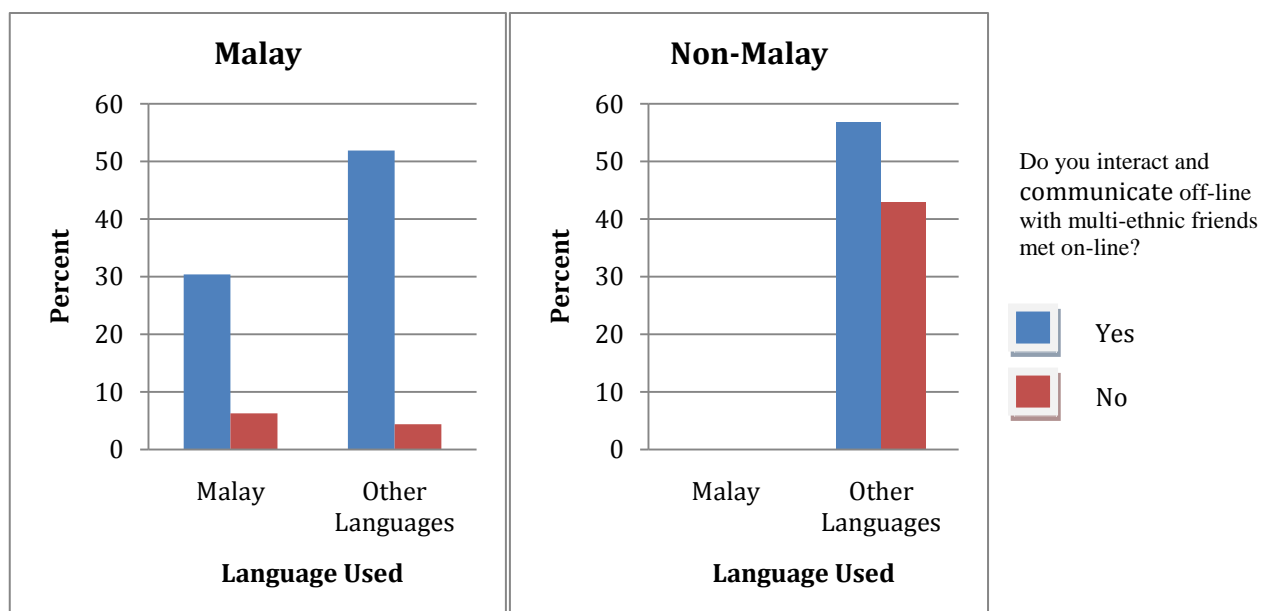


Figure 7.11: Comparison of Interaction between Two Groups Based on Language Used

7.5 Cultural and Religious Observations

More than half (53% or 85 of 162) of the respondents in the survey claimed that they had never experienced difficulties in social relationships with other ethnic groups on-line and off-line. In most of the statements they made, respondents clearly show their stand on how they perceive others as equal and less-disruptive. Factors such as sharing the same interests, schooling and work backgrounds and inter-marriage have been most associated with the way respondents see connections with those outside of their ethnic group. This has been influenced by their networks and socialization across groups and accordingly, inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia, from their points of view, were seen as relatively stable and established high tolerance towards each other. For this particular group, becoming an on-line community member has not changed their circumstances in terms of personal relationships with other ethnic communities.

“Err...ethnic isn’t important as long as we get along well, with the same interest, that’s fine.”

“I have always been open to inter-ethnic communication.”

“I have no problems interacting with people from other ethnicity, so it does not make a different.”

“I never have any problem interacting with any person from the same or different ethnic groups, online or offline.”

“It has never been an issue. Why should it even be one?”

“It was never an issue or concern.”

“No change. I have always felt the same about interacting with people of other ethnicities before and after going on-line. That is no judging the people.”

“No change. I’ve been interacting with multi-ethnic groups of people always. i.e from schooling days up to working life.”

“No. I’m in mixed marriage (Malay/Chinese) and I am mixed (Malay/Indian/Arabic) so I am a multiracial person.”

“No. I’m not a racist by birth. So everyone is equal and same to me. I’m ‘bangsa Malaysia’ (Malaysian nation). I was brought up to respect all people regardless of color and ethnic.”

“No. I’ve always comfortable interacting with others from different ethnic groups.”

“No. It’s never an issue for me to mix with different ethnic group of people.”

“No. It doesn’t change anything as I always comfortable communicating with people from the same or different ethnic groups.”

“No. Race doesn’t matter.”

Despite a high percentage of respondents choosing to stand on the neutral side of scrutiny, about 35% (56) others offered relatively different point of views. Careful analysis indicated some important comments which reflect the fact that inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia have surrounding issues: “Yes, because in the real world, we might not really interact with other ethnic groups”; “Yes, we might have bias [towards others before this]. Interacting with others [from different ethnic backgrounds] [in on-line communities] changed this and brings about awareness [of how to respect other people].” It did though, lead to several constructive comments suggesting that participating in an on-line community has helped them change their perception towards others. Overall, the responses suggest that not having connections with other ethnic groups develops sense of doubt, lack of confidence, prejudice and mistrust between groups. Lack of experience with people from different ethnic backgrounds, class, cultures and religions affect the way everyday social relationships develop throughout the community. Limited opportunities for individuals or even groups to get connected were seen as part of the problem. By having a virtual community as a means of interaction, people become exposed to opportunities for getting to know each other better and thus, help improve the way they manage their social relationships in off-line settings.

“During on-line, words are being exchanged and relationship could be enhanced before meeting in person or even could understand their characteristics via on-line interaction. As for off-line, we have to look at their facial expressions before saying anything. Therefore, interacting on-line before meeting up could change the feelings in a definite way.”

“It is easier to communicate off-line once you have met the person on-line.”

“I do not have any problem interacting with those groups (off different ethnicity). In fact I really enjoyed it because I got to know different people with different belief and background. Hence, it also expands my networks and information.”

“Yes, mixing with different circles and cultures.”

“Yes. [Having communication with other ethnic on-line] makes me easier to communicate with them off-line.”

“Communicate on-line led me to interact confidently with people from other ethnic off-line.”

In terms of cultural and religious concerns, none of the respondents commented on any significant constraints regarding cultural and religious associations with other ethnicities. In fact, many of them believe that through on-line communities they are able to learn more about their new friends, including about their culture and religion which they might not have been aware of before.

“I feel more comfortable and respect each other culture.”

“Yes, it helps me to know other ethnic better.”

“Yes, at least it makes me understand other ethnic groups more.”

7.6 Gender Issues

The survey of members sought to explore personal experiences as a way to identify issues concerning male-female participation in the selected on-line communities. The analysis indicates that more than half (68.5%) of the respondents chose to be unresponsive whilst the rest have noticeably addressed several issues ranging from friendship to personal matters. Findings (based on 31.5% responses) show both male and female members commonly expressed pleasure in finding new friends and establishing social networks amongst peers as truly rewarding. Compared to the males, the number of female respondents was noticeably higher with respect to making on-line friends. This result could support earlier studies showing that women were found to positively relate to the use of the Internet due to its protected environment (Hamburger, 2005) and also be more likely to use social networks for support. According to Hamburger (2005) the anonymity factor of the Internet, with no physical proximity or contact with the person with whom he/she interacts, offers the users complete control of the interaction. Therefore, this makes he/she feel him/herself to be in a protected environment, which allows them to express themselves more freely on

the net than they feel able to in an off-line relationship. This clearly suggests that the development of on-line communities in Malaysia has created a relatively new and pleasant environment for women to build relationship with others and thus, increase the prospect of creating their own personal networks. On the other side, on-line communities offer relatively equal opportunities for women to participate and be involved in social engagements as much as men can possibly do.

“[I managed to] find more friends thus we can share anything.”
(Female)

“Gain lots of friends from all over Malaysia.”(Female)

“I met many people through this community, sharing opinion and mostly I can generate new idea from their opinion and part of them now is my best friend which I trust them.”(Female)

I met my ‘sister’ here in VirtualFriends.net, I met my ex-boyfriend here in VirtualFriends.net, I met with some foreigners here in VirtualFriends.net and we became friends until now. I met various people here in VirtualFriends.net. I obtained lots of knowledge here in VirtualFriends.net as well as having lots of friends here in VirtualFriends.net. I love VirtualFriends.net as a medium of knowledge gaining place and a place for friendship.”(Female)

“Just meet a new friend!”(Female)

“I felt so happy. Never feel bored since I’ve met many friends here. Once we’re all free we’ll hang out together. It is so good to meet both my old and new friends here.” (Female)

“Sometimes we can know other people behave and we can learn some new information and sharing ideas to other. My experience in on-line communities like facebook, myspace, VirtualFriends.net and blogger, sometimes we can tell to others about ourself and sharing other information with friends. When we trust each other, we can meet them and friendship last forever.”(Female)

Meeting new friends through an on-line medium could be a common thing to happen to people involved in on-line communities. Through communication and regular interaction, people manage to find connections and similarities in various ways, such as sharing similar hobbies, interest and thoughts. Usually, the chemistry that slowly develops could bring other levels of “on-line romantic relationship” (Ben-Ze’ev, 2005). A high tendency for female members in the survey to search for and make new friends

on-line was actually not limited to having “a regular friend”. A number of female respondents were found enthusiastically expressing their joy of either using the medium to find companions or to meet their significant other by chance. Consider the following statement by these two female respondents:

“Briefly, I would like to say that I managed to find my significant other on an on-line community website and we have been together for a year now and hope to get married soon.”(Female)

“I get more friends and know more information about anything. Also it can create relationship with others. I think this community is the best source to get lovers.”(Female)

Additional factors have been suggested in other research. For example, Aaron Ben-Ze’ev (2005) suggests that what drives people to look for and have personal relationships on-line is that the medium enables them to get to know each other without having to cope with the heavy burden of stereotypes that are always associated with physical appearance. Ben-Ze’ev in his article entitled “Detachment: the unique nature of on-line romantic relationships” (2005) views on-line relationships as different from off-line relationships because they attach less weight to external appearances, which are revealed by vision, but more weight to positive appraisal of the other’s characteristics, such as emotional attitudes towards each other, which are revealed by verbal communication. According to Ben-Ze’ev, on-line relationships prevent people from relying mainly on physical attributes when evaluating other people, and hence they avoid the unjustified advantages that are usually granted to attractive people.

Despite having such new types of social enclave across society, on-line communities were seen as a means for someone in the group to search for or develop kinds of special personal bonds towards the other. As asserted by some scholars, relationships can and do form over the Internet, and these relationships can become quite close (e.g. Parks & Floyd, 1995). In between there will always be an issue with inter-personal relationships between both men and women. Whitty (2009) found in her investigation of 320 chat rooms that men and women admitted to lying in chat rooms about their age, gender, occupation, education and income. However, men were significantly more likely than women to lie about gender, occupation, education and

income. As occurred in this current research, some female respondents raised the issue of unacceptable behaviour of the opposite gender concerning on-line dating.

“Majority of guys use it to chat up gals with various intents.”(Female)

“Try not to fall in love with online friends unless you meet them personally and get to know them from third person.”(Female)

“Yes, [participating in the] on-line community makes my eyes blind. I used to be so fools especially when we talked about love. It is hard for me to describe. What can I say is I’m hurt!”(Female)

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter attempts to explore demographic trends and member’s networking activities in the six selected on-line communities and to discover attitudes and experiences of members towards inter-ethnic relationship on-line and also off-line. There are 3 preliminary conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis. Firstly, as a relatively new phenomenon in Malaysia, the demographic structure of the six on-line communities involved in this study reflect a pattern of domination by young, educated and career oriented persons with the majority residing in the most developed region of the country. Therefore, this clearly explains how education levels, knowledge and availability of ICT facilities play an important role in supporting the growth of on-line communities in a developing country such as Malaysia. In terms of ethnicity and gender, the Malays as the ethnic majority contribute a larger number of participants, which supports the view that the existence of on-line communities in Malaysia has been attractive to this ethnic group. As indicated in the analysis, the number of female participants was noticeable higher in comparison to the males, which indicates gender equality in access to modern communication technology. This also shows that whilst many women in the third world have been seen as deprived, Malaysian women, on the other hand, have greater opportunities to participate and experience a variety of social activities in a comprehensive environment offered by the Internet.

The second conclusion is that there is great potential waiting for further development of on-line communities in Malaysia. Based on positive trends in use of the Internet for networking activities, the numbers of on-line members is predicted to grow and thus, could increase the possibility of the formation of a variety of new on-line communities. Concerning the visits and time spent by the members in their respective on-line communities, the new medium, without doubt, will become a regular forum for social interaction and one that is increasingly being used by a significant portion of society.

The third conclusion is that the current findings concerning social capital and inter-ethnic integration through on-line communities at large, repeating similar outcomes of the previous analysis in Chapter 6. Analysis suggests that on-line communities in Malaysia do have the potential to widen social networking, generate positive social capital across society and more importantly, hold the prospect of enhancing social integration between ethnicities. Whilst views by some administrators in previous analyses have raised concerns as to how on-line activities may face difficulties when transferred to a real community, the present analysis, however, suggests this might be questioned. Responses concerning social activities show that members enjoy getting to know new multi-ethnic friends on-line and many of them have managed to extend their relationships off-line. Issues such as class, language use, cultural and religious differences were seen as less significant between ethnicities. Rather, on-line communities offer a medium for members to come to issues with differences as well as being a place for members to build high tolerance towards better integration.

The next chapter will combine both findings gathered from on-line community administrators and on-line members to discuss the issues of on-line networking, social capital and social integration from a wider perspective. Discussion will be supported by information gathered from the general public and selected Government's representatives to generate further analysis of the impacts brought about by the existence of on-line communities within the context of Malaysia's multi-ethnic society.

Chapter 8

SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE CONTEXT OF MALAYSIAN ON-LINE COMMUNITIES: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

8.0 Introduction

The two previous chapters (Chapters 6 and 7) analyzed materials gathered from on-line community administrators and the experiences of the people involved as members of six selected on-line communities. What was learnt from the corpus of data allows for a further exploration of broader issues relating to social capital, social integration and national identity. Discussion mainly focuses on understanding of the role of trust and reciprocity in shaping the formation and/or challenges of social capital development in both the real and virtual life of ethnic group-based communities. Several issues which affected the development of social capital, such as culture and religious practices, language and national identity are frequently raised and discussed. This is crucial in order to draw on the theoretical underpinnings of emerging patterns of bridging and/or bonding capital across on-line ethnic communities. Arguments will be drawn from interviews with 27 public informants from diverse ethnic groups and two Government representatives, including an interview with Tun Mahathir Mohamad, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia. The observations, ideas and views provided are glimpses of the issues described demonstrating how everyday life practices of ordinary Malaysians

affect both on-line and off-line relationships. More importantly, these seek to offer reflections on how on-line communities were expected to contribute towards national unity formation in Malaysia.

8.1 On-line Communities, Social Networking and Identity Formation

The six on-line communities involved in the study – USJ, PJNet, SARA, MalaysiaMAYA.com, VirtualFriends.net and FamilyPlace.com – are at the frontier of such emerging forms of communities in Malaysia. Not only do they symbolize a future of community practices demarcated by advancing technology, but they also signify the country's image of modernity and their hope to achieve the status of an information society and knowledge-based economy/society in the years ahead.

Based on the administrators' standpoints, the six on-line communities demonstrated various dimensions of social capital that existed amongst those networks. The initial analysis indicated that three of the on-line communities (SARA, MalaysiaMAYA.com and FamilyPlace.com) reveal potential for the development of social capital and inter-ethnic interaction, whereas the other three communities (USJ, PJNet and VirtualFriends.net) indicated difficulty (see Chapter 6 for details). In order to confirm this, another test was done involving statistical analysis of the data gathered from general members. The results show that communicating and interacting on-line contributes to various beneficial consequences for building social capital, like generating interpersonal trust and reinforcing inter-ethnic community ties.

Both sets of data analyzed revealed significant differences of how on-line and off-line communication played out in the field of inter-ethnic interaction. One possible reason for this might be due to the fact that what people say and what they actually do can be different. As Foucault (1991) argued, individuals tend to react to situations in different ways. People may respond to surveys or interview questions in terms of what they think they should or would do. Positive responses derived from on-line community members reflect the way they believe that they may know all the other ethnic members and they may communicate and socialize with them without difficulty. As indicated in Robert Merton's functionalist theory, there is a category of people called the "all-

weather liberal” (see Chapter 4 for details). This type of social relationship reflects the understanding that people tend to have less prejudice and discrimination towards others, but most of the time seek to avoid such feelings or perceptions. This is because people may prefer not to be challenged by others and do not want to be disturbed. However, it is argued that proximity and more social involvement may change views and attitudes. As from the perspective of inter-group contact theory (Allport, 1958), it is believed that continuous interactions amongst members who come from majority and minority groups would lead to either improvement or deterioration of relationship amongst the groups.

8.1.1 On-line Identity Formation

The different inter-ethnic relationship patterns that emerge from the six on-line communities (see Chapter 6) demonstrate significantly different ways that social networking occurs across members. Careful examination indicates that such dissimilarities were due to unequal ethnic composition of members. Three communities: USJ, PJNet and VirtualFriends.net reveal a situation where numbers of a particular ethnic group noticeably exceeds the others. USJ and PJNet, for example, have more Chinese registered as members. In contrast, VirtualFriends.net has attracted almost 100% ethnic Malays who dominate all the community programs and activities. These three on-line communities, which are administrated by ethnic Chinese or Malay management teams, respectively reflect the fact that these communities belong to and are led by specific ethnic communities.

When a social group is dominated by a specific ethnic community, the social identity of that particular ethnic group is made visible. Having a greater number of homogeneous members reassures the benefits of living in their comfort zones. This is similar to a real community where any dominant group tends to reinforce their group behavior and shared values. Just like where Malay-Muslims in a locality consider building more mosques than temples or churches in their residential area, this also happens in virtual communities. On-line community programs and agendas tend to reflect the specific cultural context of the dominant social group. Lisa Nakamura (2002) within the discourse of race, ethnicity and identity on the Internet has coined the term

“cybertype” (p.3) to describe the distinctive ways in which the Internet propagates, disseminates and commodifies images of race and racism in the virtual medium. By saying that racial cybertypes are about to bring together the “cultural layer” and “computer layer”, she defines cybertypes as:

“...the process by which computer/human interfaces, the dynamic and economic of access, and the means by which users are able to express themselves online interacts with the ‘cultural layer’ or ideologies regarding race that they bring with them into cyberspace.” (p.3)

The notion of a cybertype as introduced by Nakamura can be understood as the way in which on-line users bring along their cultural identity when communicating on-line. To relate this to the current case, my argument is that the exposure of cultural identity is even stronger when on-line users find more members who share similar identities. In many ways, socio-cultural identities in virtual community practices can be highlighted through several characteristics such as language use, social activities and opinions discussed. These become a discourse: the way people share and transfer information and knowledge between each other. Therefore, when the depiction of similar social backgrounds and cultural identities occur, this easily reinforces a bonding factor of a specific ethnic group. However, this may also contribute to the loss of balance within each on-line community’s disposition.

Sharing the same cultural identity in an on-line medium allows for a circulation of knowledge that transfers only between group members, thus giving them empowerment. Foucault asserts that it is through discourse (through knowledge) that we are created. Thus, it is true that we are the sum of our experiences that are the knowledge we encounter. In a group of people who share similar cultural backgrounds, history and identity, their knowledge will depend upon just their own people. In a sense, those members in groups create each other’s identities. A person who is trapped in this circulation of cultural discourse knows what is communicated by their peer group.

Observation throughout the case of the three “problematic” on-line communities (USJ, PJNet and VirtualFriends.net) in the study suggests that differences in the number of members from the main ethnic groups has generated issues such as: stereotypes, prejudices, cultural and religious suspicion as well as many other related conflicts

which are relevant to socio-historical understanding. This is even more crucial when such communities bring their on-line relationships into the facilitation of real-life involvement. Considering this, it is argued that Blumer's symbolic interaction theory that explains inter-ethnic relations and racism is still relevant to be discussed in the context of on-line communities. As long as divisions between dominant and subordinate groups still occur, defining social relationships in on-line communities, the fact is that anonymity and lack of physical judgment can not guarantee that a sense of belonging will be developed across different groups.

In comparison, communities which achieve a comparatively mixed ethnic composition as shown in SARA, MalaysiaMAYA.com and FamilyPlace.com are able to maintain integration of inter-ethnic identities and practices in both on-line and off-line communication and activities. These communities tend to grow as an ideal model of on-line and off-line social capital. Individuals' ethnic group identities are becoming more fluid, i.e., they are achieving "fluid identities", acquiring the ability to carve out new, less oppressive norms towards achieving the capacity to "acknowledge diversity". This idea is not new; it has been put forward by Sherry Turkle (1995, p.261) in her writings on "Life on the Screen: Identity in the age of the Internet" as below:

"When identity was defined as unitary and solid it was relatively easy to recognize and censure deviation from a norm. A more fluid sense of self allows for a greater capacity for acknowledging diversity. It makes it easier to accept the array of our (and others') inconsistent personae – perhaps with humor, perhaps with irony. We do not feel compelled to rank or judge the elements of our multiplicity. We do not feel compelled to exclude what does not fit."

The problem of social capital within different ethnic groups with different identities and cultural practices has been previously discussed in the context of real life communities (see for example Alesina and La Ferrara, 2000). As revealed in the cases of the six on-line communities in this study, the existence of the on-line medium is likely to be able to eradicate the notion of physical identities and firm boundaries between diverse ethnic groups and gain fluid identities. In some cases, there is evidence that computer mediated communication (CMC) is primarily successful in affording frequent social contact with a high number of ethnic communities when the ability to facilitate on-line and off-line relationships has provided access to a valuable form of

social capital. However, in other cases, the ability to organize for collective action on- and off-line is confronted by a paradox between the real and virtual life of diverse ethnicities. Living with different values, beliefs and completely distinctive ways of life influences different expectations between each community's members, especially when they meet their on-line friends off-line. Where there is relationship building in on-line situations and when they meet off-line, the fact of being different becomes more apparent. This further distorts the process of acquiring social capital and maintaining on-line and off-line communities across diverse groups because they now have to face the issues of trust and reciprocity.

8.2 The Issues of Trust and Reciprocity in Virtual and Real Life

Rob Shields (2003), a Canadian sociologist, describes the virtual as “real but not actual” (p.25). In order to comprehend what Shields is trying to explain from this short yet precise argument, straightforward thinking suggests that being virtual, acting virtual and living virtual are not the same as being real and acting in the real world. The ambiguous border between the real and virtual could be referred to as like pair of identical twins who biologically shared the same womb, have similar physical attributes but could be different in their personalities, ways of thinking or behaviors. These dissimilarities may be a product of the way they have been socially nurtured or simply because they do not want to look and be perceived as the same. Looking at the issue of real-virtual is similar to how we differentiate and understand who's who of the twin siblings. We might see them as physically indistinguishable but they are actually different. This is also true in the way we see how people interact, communicate and make contact with each other in the real-virtual discourse. They are the same person, but they hold distinctive, intangible qualities which might influence their behavior, as well as regulating the way they act especially in negotiating their real-virtual identities or vice-versa. It is argued that people who are on-line can easily become chameleons, intentionally or unintentionally.

Measuring levels of social interaction through the formation of social capital in on-line-off-line social relationships is rather difficult. In fact, it is more challenging

when directly touching the life of diverse communities which certainly embrace distinctive socio-cultural identities. As suggested by Porter and Lyon (2006), linking the concepts of social capital and culture may involve complexity because they depend largely on how a particular culture is defined, based on its specific geographical and historical context. Whilst the central idea of social capital is around such themes as trust, norms of reciprocity and networks (Putnam, 1993, 1995), diversity of culture may add a further dimension to the concept.

Many scholars (see for example, Spencer & Inkeles, 1976; Coleman & Cressey, 1980; Vander Zanden, 1996) have suggested that integration between distinctive groups of people could be realized when element of racial differences held within both tribes (e.g. skin color, language, costume and tradition) become less important, even though not completely eliminated. Sharing similar interests and goals with less concern about each other's differences may encourage mutual understanding and help increase a sense of trust and reciprocity, which are the primary essences of social capital (Lauglo, 2000). However, advancement in human communication and interaction brought about by ICTs has made significant impact on shaping social relationships. A higher level of diversity in human-computer interaction could either simplify or complicate the way integration and social capital develops across society.

In the previous interview analysis, (see Chapter 6 for details) five out of six selected on-line communities (USJ, PJNet, SARA, MalaysiaMAYA.com and FamilyPlace.com, which are mixed residential-based, SNS and communities of interest) were claimed as successfully forming a blended group of members, developing a bridging type of on-line social networking. Several descriptive findings from the survey of members appear to support these assertions. Almost 80% of the members argue that they had made many new friends since participating in the on-line communities, with about 72% of them claiming their friends are of multi-ethnicities. This suggests that the virtual medium does facilitate people's relationships across various personal backgrounds and also geographical boundaries. Many researchers (see for example McLuhan, 1962; Rhiengold, 1993; Castells, 1996; Shields, 1996) have demonstrated that social communication on-line helps strengthen ties between people, thus the reputation of CMC in enforcing social relationships is certainly undeniable. Creating and building relationships on-line are somehow easier than face-to-face interactions.

This is due to the on-line medium providing flexibility for meeting others, convenience in terms of fluidity of time and place (Castells, 1996). With only one mouse click, people can simply have numbers of new virtual friends, instantly, without leaving their own bedrooms. Because meeting on-line friends does not involve physical appearances, engaging with companions out of their own ethnic groups could be less problematic (Ben-Ze'ev, 2005). Without seeing what others' skin colors are or the way they dress, virtual interactions which happen mostly amongst people who use an avatar rather than visual image of themselves (for example, video links) could help in blurring a prejudice barrier (Glaser & Khan, 2005).

Relationships though, could be harder to maintain than to create. Understanding and the sense of trust which develops between people through on-line communication and activities cannot guarantee that the same qualities of interaction, communication, reaction and trustworthiness could be retained as in a real meeting. As a central element in social capital, maintaining trust in both on-line and off-line relationships is of utmost importance. However, to sustain the quality of trust in both virtual and real interactions is challenging. It is argued that trust that builds on-line is actually limited: temporary and most of the time not real.

Hence, it is important to highlight here that there are two different kinds of trust that exist in on-line and off-line relationships respectively. In on-line circumstances where interactions are only based on textual communication, trust could easily develop especially when it entails general knowledge sharing, information exchanged and transmission. However, this excludes personal matters. In an on-line forum for instance, information posted by a particular person is circulated in a public sphere where many other users can see and judge the validity of the message. If the information or knowledge provided appears to be false or misleading, other users or members can easily counteract the problem by correcting, adding or simply posting a comment on the message. Unlike sharing information and knowledge on-line, awareness of trust has become integral when it comes to personal matters. People tend to be more cautious about how they make on-line relationships with strangers. Even though personal trust may be built over time, especially when people start to feel comfortable and happy to share their ideas, interests and self with other members in the on-line community, this cannot guarantee that the same level of trust can be retained when it comes to off-line

relationships. This is crucial when relationships involve individuals or groups who come from different socio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Putnam (2007) in his recent research “Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey” in the United States seems to suggest a similar idea. The findings indicate that those who are living in more racially or ethnically heterogeneous social environments and neighborhoods tend to not only have negative consequences for intergroup trust, but also less intergroup trust as well as social trust in general.

As shown in the survey analysis, about 72% of the total 138 members trust the answers or information given by their on-line counterparts. Based on such a high percentage, it could be assumed that trusting information is not an issue for most on-line communities’ members. Therefore, this highlights the positive prospect of virtual communities as an alternative means for enforcing social capital through relatively loose networks and information exchange. People thus do appear to be able to build a sense of trust towards on-line information, content and answers they read or receive. In these circumstances where finding information and new knowledge is the most preferred activity amongst on-line community members (95% of 162 members), the tendency to trust the information received is thus indisputable. Furthermore, some kinds of information can easily be exchanged between members because it does not involve the need for physical contact. Exchanging information and knowledge about general concerns and interests, such as a famous place to eat, best hotel in town, beauty tips and even certain topics on parenting and children as mainly discussed on FamilyPlace.com, have not affected the way trust is treated in their virtual socialization.

Trust towards on-line information and its content is arguably not the same as the notion of trust as suggested by the concept of social capital. There is a different quality of trust created in the virtual medium in comparison to the trust between people produced through actual life socializations. Trust which has been generated in a virtual sphere might show a mutual respect for “mutual information” but, as I argued before, it is a different kind of notion, a more limited form of trust that cannot be realized in real relationships. The features of borderless on-line communities which allow people to come and go too easily gives a lower sense of responsibility amongst members, thus immediately lowers expectations of trust (Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, 2004). In contrast, trust as related to the concept of social

capital brings a relatively “heavy meaning”, a real commitment and strong reliance amongst a community’s members. As Sullivan et al., (2002) states, in a real community, social trust begins with “individual-level internalization of norms and reciprocity, which facilitates collective action” (p.4). This means that the process of building trust is varied according to individuals or group experiences. Reciprocal trust in a relationship leads to ongoing development, while a break in trust can undermine relationships. Overall, trust is important in a relationship simply because people do not like their companions to take advantage of them. Can trust-relationships be easily built in on-line circumstances, the medium which certainly offers relatively blind physical judgments? Stolle et al. (2008) indicate that diversity may only be problematic for social trust in the absence of positive social interactions with those diverse others. The question is, does on-line interaction always provide these “positive” social interactions?

While trust in information and content is somehow easy to predict, it is argued that developing on-line trust is hard to achieve when it comes to a matter of exclusive or personal issues. Can we simply trust on-line mates to help out with our private problems and security? For instance, are we daring enough to ask a “trusted” on-line member to take care of our children in an emergency situation? In the real community, we could trust our neighbors to doing this even though we do not frequently communicate with or know them personally. At least through face-to-face communication we have an idea of how they look, the way they live and socialize, their attitudes and so on. These may give us some quick idea, identification and guarantee of whether we can trust such individuals. However, this would also depend on how well we know our neighbors. As we build relationships, we would deepen the trust and be willing to “exchange” more tasks with them.

As found in the study, issues of trust in on-line communication remain critical to members, especially women. Several negative claims made by female members in the survey suggest that women are easily cheated by men in on-line relationships. This evidently shows that trust becomes fundamental when it comes to personal issues. Seven out of 10 female participants¹ who were interviewed tell of their anxieties about having relationships with strangers in on-line communities.

¹ This refers participants from the general public.

“...I think finding and making friends in a real life is better than online because it could be dangerous! I do not like it seriously! Because in the Internet we do not know their true identities. They can write whatever they want. They might even lie to us. Many of my friends have been cheated by their online friends. If I make friends online, it will be limited only to online communication, definitely no face-to-face meeting. It is dreadful!

(Chinese Female, 18)

In an environment where social-relationships are dependent on communication and trust, people could easily manipulate others through their exceptional wording and text skills. According to Glaser and Khan (2005) “the Internet was touted as a place for women to finally free themselves of the harassment traditionally experienced in classroom, employment, and other setting” (p.262) because of the anonymity they have in on-line conversations. However, Biber et al. (2002) found that harassment experienced on-line may in fact be worse than traditional harassment because of the anonymity factor. This supports what Winter and Huff (cited in Glasser & Khan, 2005; p.250) indicate in their analysis of women’s efforts to find safe environments on-line as anonymity in on-line conversation can lead to high levels of gender harassment on the Internet. Views of some female respondents reflect the fact that members can barely face the issue of trust and misbehavior created by their opposite gendered friends. Obviously, despite being a great place to get connected and build chains of networks, on-line communities could place women in a risky milieu when it comes to the matter of inter-gender relationships; as a matter of fact, this was also the case in the circulation of Malaysian on-line society.

Not only is the issue of trust found to be critical amongst women participants, it also attracted similar concerns from those who have young kids.² Some parents tend to discourage their children in taking part in on-line communication due to security issues mostly related to untrustworthiness and other negative influences of having new on-line friends. For these parents, social integration between younger generations is impossible to achieve through merely on-line communication because in the on-line medium people are not real and tend to be dishonest towards others. Consider the following quote:

² This is also refers to participants from the general public.

“I have friends who had been cheated before, honestly. He got it twice. In on-line, they are very friendly but when met face to face, the persons actually have very different personalities. It is a kind of hypocrite...that’s why I don’t believe much on on-line relationships. I’m much more conservative person. For me, meeting each other at the road is better than online. But new generation maybe have different thinking because they want to spend time on-line and chatting. But for me it is different. I never allowed my children do on-line things until they are 21 years old. Sharing information on-line is also untruthfully because anything can happen especially youngsters who using on-line medium for bad purposes such as selling drugs etc.”
(Chinese Male, 50)

Several on-line communities in this study (SARA, USJ and PJNet) were claimed to have successfully created a highly cooperative community model with well organized and mixed on-line multi-ethnic members. All on-line community administrators revealed that the secret of achieving such communities is due to a moderation factor whereby every offending entry or post that tends towards being racist or harassing other members in the community will be removed. It is certainly true that communities which are well moderated may enhance trust amongst general members, at least towards content and other information circulated within the communities. But, the question is: does moderating and removing people’s annoying posts, entries or even words in order to create peaceful on-line communities guarantee the real attitudes of such irresponsible members can be changed? Even if their posts were deleted, this does not erase their true behaviors, perceptions, values, beliefs, identities and perhaps prejudices and suspicions that they hold. It is argued that a person’s state of mind is hardly changed in this circumstance. When they meet other people in real life they will act according to who they truly are. Thus, trust that builds amongst members in their respective on-line communities may not necessarily mirror the real attitudes or mentalities of members and hence, could hardly be maintained off-line. People show their pleasant attitudes in a virtual medium because they have to do so. It is a well-established fact that individuals typically belong to many social groups and thus hold multiple social identities (see e.g., Crisp & Hewstone, 2007). In such on-line communities, members are controlled by certain regulations and community laws which force them to keep hidden their true self and real identity in order to maintain the sense of community and trust amongst members.

More than half (68.9%) of on-line members allege that they have met their virtual multi-ethnic friends face-to-face. This verifies the previous claims made by some administrators (SARA, MalaysiaMAYA.com and FamilyPlace.com) that their communities' off-line programs and activities were fully supported by multi-ethnic members. This finding supports previous research by Ibrahim et al. (2009) which indicates that even though people do not trust those who are from outside of their groups (strangers), they are still willing to interact with them. With all this evidence, we could easily jump to the conclusion that on-line communities do encourage inter-ethnic relations and therefore, successfully construct social capital between groups. However, what we do not know is; what was actually happening during the meetings? How long do the relationships between individuals or groups last? And, how do these particular individuals or groups manage to negotiate between their virtual and actual identities?

The real meaning of intergroup relationships cannot be evaluated merely from evidence shown through on-line interactions. Social capital which is expected to form through on-line communication and participation is not merely based on on-line trust, but also on a norm of reciprocity which is likely to involve off-line activity as well as "real life" acceptance. Here, contact between groups is important. Contact theory (Allport, 1958) suggests that frequent and positive interaction with out-group members may have positive implications for intergroup relations. Ironically, virtual and actual lives are not the same in many ways. Virtual interactions are dependant largely on text communications, avatars and also symbols, which are free from intonation, touch, smell, expression and emotion; the senses that simultaneously appear when we engage in face-to-face communication. The success of on-line communication is normally based on the creativity, sensitivity and skill of the sender in presenting messages. It is important too for the messages to be correctly interpreted by the receiver. There is always the likelihood of some miscommunication which may disturb the message transmission and consequently contribute to an ineffective connection. Having a linear understanding towards the messages and their content may increase the frequency of exchanging information and, in the long run, the likelihood of developing mutual understandings between the on-line communicators.

A strong sense of understanding and feelings of acceptance of others in the virtual medium, though, do not necessarily guarantee any real acceptance. When people meet

their on-line mates outside, their true identities, personalities, and behavior are revealed. They may find that their on-line friends are not as nice as they think when communicating off-line. This might have an impact on the degree of trust and reciprocity given. In the real life, there are so many things that may influence the way we approach others; the way we greet people, body language, etc. Communication off-line is no longer the same as communication that happens on-line. Many things that we usually do and agree when communicating on-line cannot be done off-line, mostly because of practical barriers. The off-line medium will always open up possibilities for us to be in a “differences dilemma”. In fact, everybody has his/her own different spaces and constraints. For instance, not everybody likes the way others dress, their attitudes and people have their own ways of faith and belief. All these factors may lead to the absence of “meaningful positive contact” (Schmid, et al., 2009; p. 182), which will be associated negatively with intergroup relations, particularly if one’s social environment is dominated by a high outgroup-to-ingroup ratio. For all these reasons, it can be argued that on-line relationships are not essentially sustainable and perhaps, most of the time not real. Relationships could easily fail once individuals or groups realize that the connections and chemistry that were built on-line are no longer present or could not possibly be maintained in off-line relationships. Therefore, situations that occurred in the on-line communities of USJ, PJNet and VirtualFriends.net, which once rejoiced a blend of ethnic members on-line and off-line, could possibly mirror this case. The following extract taken from an interview with one of the public participants reflects a similar idea of the differentiation between on-line and off-line relationships.

“Internet relationships are different than real relationships. For me, it is always not the same. Even though we are close on-line we are not necessarily close in a real world. Ethnic integration could possibly happen through on-line communities but the members must show a high commitment towards the communities he/she bonded to. Also, their perceptions towards online friends when they communicate and interact on-line and off-line must be the same. Then integration can happen.”

(Malay Male, 25)

8.3 Culture and Religious Practices

As mentioned earlier, many factors can contribute to a sense of difference when we are in our physical world. As has been explored in this study, concerns with cultural practices and religious observations are found to significantly influence the way on-line community members socialize with other counterparts, especially in negotiating a decision to attend a face-to-face meeting. In the other words, different perceptions about culture and religious practices hinder the process of developing trust between multi-ethnic on-line community members, especially when meeting each other off-line.

Culture regulates human understanding of who they are and how they are different from others based on certain values and practices identified within their own groups (Abdullah & Pedersen, 2006). This includes all learned and acquired behaviors, which are generally considered to be the group's traditions, transmitted from one generation to the next. Culture is largely based on a set of assumptions which are often hidden but still stand as an important aspect that manifests in people's day to day interface with others. In some circumstances, culture may possibly integrate ways of thinking, understanding, evaluating and communicating that makes a shared way of life possible (Calhoun, et al., 1997). However, differences in cultural practices and religious views could also lead to opposite consequences.

The issues pertaining to culture and religion remain crucial in most of the lives of Malaysian multi-cultures, especially within the Malay ethnic community. Malaysia has undergone radical social, economic and political development over the last four decades in response to many significant events during the colonization period and its aftermath. Ironically, to catch up with the world's rapid transformation, Malaysia has had to leapfrog from a basically agrarian society into the age of the information superhighway and globalization in just less than 40 years; the changes that took about 200 years for many developed countries such as in Northern Europe to evolve (Abdullah & Pedersen, 2006). Even though there have been phenomenal changes in the country's physical landscape, there are many core traditional values, such as respect for religion, that remain intact in communities' cultural landscapes and strongly inherent in the mind, body and inner self of all Malaysians.

Analysis of the views and experiences of on-line community administrators suggests the need for consideration of the elements of culture and religion within Malay Muslim perspectives towards creating networks and developing personal trust with non-Muslim members of on-line communities. These cultural concerns, which are seen as elusive in on-line communication and interaction, become fundamental when different ethnic members meet in the real world. Both the Malay and non-Malay administrators saw distinctive ways of life, along with differences in perceptions about religion and beliefs, which in turn affects the way trust and reciprocities are built between the various groups.

The Government's efforts to promote the use and application of new ICTs will result in provision of more band-width connectivity for Malaysian residents. As evidence in this research, almost 80% of on-line community members claimed that their Internet connectivity and activities were done from home. This kind of exposure has a significant impact on the way Malaysians build relationships and communicate with one another. With the majority of them subscribing to high-speed broadband connectivity, they are now seen to be assimilating the values of the Information Age as they interact with fellow Malaysians and foreigners more frequently. It has previously been argued that the rapid advances in new ICTs may lead to the removal of many barriers in human face-to-face interaction (Rheingold, 1993) as its virtual nature has helped facilitate more effortless communication between people. The on-line medium serves as a bridge for transmitting and sharing what Foucault terms a discourse; a flow of conversation that circulates information and knowledge to one other and thus, empowers them. As claimed by 35% of on-line community members in the survey, on-line communication makes it possible for two persons from two different cultural orientations to meet and make connections without being worried about their different cultural assumptions. Further, on-line communities can be seen as a useful medium enabling information and knowledge exchange, particularly concerning other cultures and religious awareness. It is argued that communication/discourse here functions as a means of what Foucault believes is a new knowledge; a form of power for creating changes in intergroup relations.

A constructive aspect of the above claim suggests that the existence of on-line communities in Malaysia accelerates interaction between different ethnicities. Hence, it

demonstrates a positive impact of on-line communities (see details in Chapter 3) to integrate people through a virtual medium. In a borderless virtual world, concern for people who are different could be the first step towards building greater cross-cultural understanding and competence. Regular communication and exchange of information and knowledge may open up possibilities to get to know our on-line mates better, and what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior in their cultures and religions. As in Foucault's view, power and knowledge come from observing others. This is fundamental as we begin to understand and acquire the appropriate skills of being truly multi-cultural. Even though the possibility of discussing culture and religious matters in on-line conversation is somehow discomfoting to some individuals or groups, the potential may gradually increase once people become more comfortable and show a friendlier attitude towards their on-line friends.

Foucault argues that change may only happen when a new counter-discursive element begins to receive wide attention through the means of communication that is a discourse or knowledge transfer. In the context of inter-ethnic relationships, the role of power/knowledge can be described with the idea that the world is known as a box of crayons. The fact that we do not know a certain color, magenta for example, makes us reject that color and this makes perfect sense: if we can bring no past knowledge to bear on a new "color" (magenta) it is natural to reject that "color" as perverse, that is, unnatural. However, through discourse sharing new knowledge, thoughts and ideas it may be possible change our perceptions about the new color. This is similar to the context of inter-ethnic acceptance – discourse and new knowledge about those who differ from us may open up possibilities for social interaction, acceptance and thus integration.

While we might have similar expectations and value orientations to our multi-ethnic friends on-line and even hold certain knowledge about them, including which cultural groups they belong to, how we manifest this knowledge in terms of real behavior can differ greatly. It is argued that getting to know and making relationships with people is not simply about understanding their way of life and beliefs. The real challenge is the extent to which we can tolerate and sacrifice our routines, perceptions and principles to accommodate others. Culture is something that is not simply taught

and gained easily; culture is something that we acquire through observation, experience and even osmosis.

The day-to-day behavior of the Malays, for instance, is very much regulated by their traditions and religious mores. This is also true for Malaysia's other ethnic groups, the Chinese and Indians. Culture is a way of life that is imbibed through examples of daily rituals and not often taught formally to followers or group members. In fact, every culture has its own way of doing things which may not make sense to others. The way members of a particular culture live, the meaning they give to their lives, the way they see the world and interact with the environment and among themselves varies from group to group. Culture, to a large extent, is instilled in people's lives as a set of values, beliefs and way of thinking and doing. Therefore, even though we are well aware of our multi-ethnic friend's cultural and religious barriers or considerations, this does not mean that we can mix, negotiating our cultures and religious beliefs just to make sure that we are accepted by others. For most of the Malay Muslims, culture and Islam are privileged and it is something that cannot be compromised. While on-line members seem to interact easily and make relationships with others in the virtual world, they still value face-to-face interactions in building trust across different ethnicities.

As earlier discussed (see details in Chapter 6), Malay Muslims observe strict dietary restrictions as a form of worship and are expected to consume food that is *halal* and prepared by Muslims. The food issue, even though less significant in other cultures, plays an important role in Malay-Muslim culture and socialization. Eating together is a symbol of preserving friendships and strengthening networks with friends, families and work colleagues. Most activities, celebrations or functions in Malay society are centered on eating and sharing food. In other words, food becomes a symbol and is used as a means to socialize, enhance personal interaction and provide opportunities to bind individuals or groups. Because of its symbolic nature, the role of food may either enhance social relationships between people or can simply set them apart. Other than the food issue, other daily practices that seem normal for non-Muslims may not be acceptable from a Malay Muslim's point of view. As raised by one of the general participants in this study, different lifestyles amongst non-Muslims have provoked cultural prejudices and hence, reflect the way trust is affected by different cultural and religious practices.

“It is hard! We are different. Like us Malay Muslims, we are more concerned about hygiene and we do have certain boundaries which limits our relationships with them. We cannot touch dogs, pigs. All those things make us skeptical. For example, when we see our Indians neighbor touches dogs; our Chinese neighbor touches pigs, we even bother to shake hand with them. But if we meet our neighbors by not shaking hand with them, they will feel curious and upset. So we better not be with them.”

(Malay Male, 34)

The gender issue is another example which demonstrates consideration of culture and religion in shaping the formation of social capital in both on-line and off-line relationships. The survey of on-line members indicated that the number of females (52.5%) is slightly more than male members (47.5%). The higher percentage was convincing enough to show that Malaysian women are equal to men in terms of accessibility to the informative media. However, as found in the study, Malay women in comparison to their non-Malay equivalent are more likely to be bound by cultural and religious identity when it comes to social contacts and image appearance. The issue of female image, as raised by the Malay administrators of VirtualFriends.net and MalaysiaMAYA.com on-line community websites, demonstrates that Malay-Muslim women strongly adhere to the values of culture and religion. Because SNS such as VirtualFriends.net and MalaysiaMAYA.com serve as a medium where members can find new friends and create social networking, the main assumption was that such networks could create boundless social relationships between men and women. Therefore, this eventually influenced these Malay Muslim community administrators to take control and remove offending female images from the community websites in order to encourage what they saw as more healthy relationships between members, in line with Malay culture and Islamic beliefs.

Table 8.1: Cultural and Religious Issues and Social Capital

Factor	Medium/Issues	Affected Elements in Social Capital
Cultural and Religious	On-line <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women images 	Networking
	Off-line <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Halal</i> issues • Lifestyles/daily 	Trust and Reciprocity

	practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's roles and participation 	
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Considering the above evidence, it is important to highlight here that the idea of social capital underlying social networks and personal relationships (as suggested by Putnam) may not necessarily work in the context of a heterogeneous community. The fact that people still value their everyday practices in negotiating relationships means it can be assumed that such attitudes exert limitations on on-line communities as a medium for enhancing social involvement and interaction across diverse peoples. As illustrated in this study, elements of cultural and religious practices remain significant for certain ethnic groups, Malay Muslims in particular. Looking back to Blumer's symbolic interaction theories (see Chapter 4 for details), it is argued that culture and religion, which remain strongly embedded in the mind and practices of this ethnic group, may create a sense of racial prejudice based on a belief that the "subordinate" group is intrinsically different – that is they are "not of our kind" (Blumer, 1965; p.135). Stone & Huges (2002) have suggested that individual trust is constituted in the personal experiences and relations that form over time and through continuous interaction. However, with different expectations and a lack of tolerance towards other people's diversity, the process of getting to know each other will become more challenging. The fact is that individuals from different ethnic groups are less likely to share common backgrounds and have similar values and norms (Rothstein & Uslander, 2004), making it harder to predict the behavior of others (Hardin, 1993; Misztal, 1995). This has further increased the hurdle to trust each other and make self-enforcing agreements towards more meaningful relationships.

8.4 Language and National Identity

"This is based on our choice. If we want something good we surely can get it but, if we want to segregate certain ethnic, it can be done as well. For example, my blog is written in both English and Malay languages. What I observed was most of the commentators who were Malays used either Malay or English language. But most of them were in Malay language. This is actually not my intention. Maybe because the topics of discussions are more related to the Malays, that is why the majority of accessing my blog were Malays. On the other hand, I

can also write about others but, this is about priority and I believe that we can have a little benefit from the Internet for national unity. But you must remember that Internet can also be a medium for segregating people. This cannot be avoided in our society. For instance, we can see now that the Chinese go to Chinese school, the Malays go to Malay school and the Indians go to Tamil school. It has been long happened in our society.”

(Mohammad, 2008)

Since the 1980s, the pace of development in Malaysia has been strongly influenced by the ideas and vision of the (former) Prime Minister Tun Mahathir Mohammad. Well-known as the father of Modern Malaysia, Mahathir holds the ideology of progressive development that is based on information technology (IT). In his publication *The Way Forward* (1998), he argues that IT is one of the most important means of realizing the goal of becoming a developed country. In line with the formulation of the national Vision 2020, this determination has brought into discourse information and communication technologies (ICTs) in every major national agenda, including the development of on-line communities. This is to make it possible for the country to switch from a more production-based to a globally knowledge-based economy.

Malaysia officially embarked upon its journey towards a knowledge society and a knowledge-based economy when it launched a Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) initiative in 1997 (Ahmad Badawi, 2007). As a way to achieve status as a developed country, the MSC is seen by the Government as an important channel for establishing the country's economy driven by the ICTs (see Chapter 2 for details about the MSC). The MSC also serves as a strategy for society to encourage a new and ubiquitous shape to the way of acquiring skills and a wealth of information and knowledge (Alhabshi, 2002). A key factor to success in this process of change is “knowledge”; it is therefore essential for the Government to nurture more knowledge workers (Damanhuri, et al., 2007). As Riley (2007) argues, to secure an abundance of knowledge among workers who understand and use these information technologies, the Government must invest more in skills development and education.

The will to stay competitive in the global market has forced Malaysia to provide high quality education, with IT literacy, as well as promoting English language proficiency across society. Ironically to keep in the race for success, the push for IT

expansion alongside the use of the English language for development is often confused with socio-cultural and political prudence of the country. Mahathir himself, even though responsible for the formulation of information policies in the country, has never lost sight of the potential consequences that will bring about the use and application of ICTs in wider society. As shown in the above quote, he tends to create awareness of how ICTs and the paradox of language selection in daily communication may provoke new ethnic conflict in the country.

In every ethno-cultural society, cultural capital is often marked through the source of variations in behavioral norms, religious observations and celebrations, food, dress and group affiliations (Abdullah & Pedersen, 2006). Language is not an exception. Issues relating to language use in Malaysia are not new. They have played an important role in determining social relationships across ethnicities for a long time. Bourdieu (in Calhoun, et al., 1997) has suggested that language can be a “social marker” (p.98) in every society, whereby it functions as an indication of people’s identity, what group they belong to, as well as their social status. He further argues that language, apart from bringing people together, can also be a medium of differentiation. As explored earlier (see Chapter 6), both Malays and non-Malay administrators have raised the issue of language as one of the factors that contributed to the lack of Malay participants in USJ Subang Jaya and PJNet off-line gatherings. It was also claimed as a reason why non-Malays were less interested in becoming VirtualFriends.net members. In both circumstances, non-Malays were identified as a group that is competent in the English language and use the language in everyday conversation, whilst the Malays are more into their mother tongue, the Malay language.

The claims made by the administrators were confirmed by survey findings, revealing that 90% of non-Malays tend to choose English for on-line communication compared with only 17% Malays. Interestingly, the survey of members also reveals that a higher percentage (44.3%) of Malays consider using both languages (Malay and English) for on-line communication rather than only Malay (36.7%). The default of English on the Internet as a content medium indicates that the English language plays an important role for on-line communication, rather than the Malay language. However, this does challenge the Malay administrator’s views about the reality of ethnic Malays and their use of language while communicating on-line. It is argued that the reason for

Malays not attending off-line meetings is probably less critically a language issue, but more likely due to other factors such as cultural and religious barriers.

On the other hand, the fact that non-Malays use more English than Malays in everyday on-line/off-line conversations probably reflects reluctance in identifying with Malaysia's national identity. As shown from the survey analysis of members, none of the non-Malays identified using the Malay language as a medium of communication.

The Malay language constitutes the national language. It would be expected that national citizens follow this. But refusal to speak the language may develop negative perceptions, such as unresponsiveness and indifference towards Malay national aspirations and unity with other ethnicities. Because not all Malays can speak fluent English, mixing with non-Malays tends to create a personal sense of incompetence and an uncomfortable feeling. This is also true in the case of VirtualFriends.net. Because the majority of members are Malays, the non-Malays who either cannot or are not willing to speak the Malay language may have a sense of discomfort and alienation from being within the dominant Malay group. With reference to Blumer's symbolic interaction perspective, a sense of superiority by the dominant group, as in this case the non-Malays with regards to their capability of using English, may also potentially develop racial prejudice. The conflict of interest in the use of language may contribute to people's resistance in getting to know each other even in virtual communities. Apart from the claims made by some community administrators, this issue appeared to be a real experience of one of the public participants:

"I have many online chatting friends. There are several Indian friends but not Chinese. Even there are many Chinese in the online chat room I visited I am not really interested to communicate with them. I know they are Chinese based on their improper Malay writings. They are more into English language. I do not know...even in online community, I cannot make friends with the Chinese. It is the same when I am at the university. I cannot stand their attitudes. They always refused to take part in every campus activity. It is different with the Indians. They are friendlier. If they (the Chinese) get the book which has been suggested by the lecturers, they would pass it to only their Chinese friends. We do not even have the chance to get it! At presentation, they always make excuses for not presenting a group work with a reason that their Malay language is poor."

(Malay Female, 24)

From a social capital point of view, the ability of a group to share similar language may accelerate the bridging process and networking potential. As for the non-Malays, having proficiency in English may speed up the process of information sharing and knowledge diffusion between them (Chinese and Indians in particular). Language becomes a medium to broaden identities and reciprocity between groups. In fact, the “weak ties” (Granovetter, 1973) that link between networks are believed to be even stronger. This further gives the power to the group; as Foucault argues, power comes from the knowledge accumulated from the group’s observations, actions and networking. In modern society, prejudice between groups no longer lies in the context of the capitalist ruling class and work force (see Chapter 4 for details). Instead, the new type of “capital” exists in the form of power/knowledge. Accordingly in the context of today’s network societies, those who have access to information are considered knowledgeable and will become a new class in the digital era. Racism in today’s cyber communities could exist in brand new “superior-inferior” relationships through domination of knowledge. With respect to intergroup relations, bridging social capital which develops amongst non-Malay groups allows them domination and control of knowledge and thus, they gain power. In contrast, Malays may not have such advantages as they only form bonding to their own group.

The issue of language use in Malaysia may continue to be unfinished business due to its unique historical significance in symbolizing Malaysia’s national identity. The problem of language will remain unresolved and, without any compelling proactive solutions, the hope to unite the diverse communities may not be achieved. Historically, the development and use of English language unity among Malaysians began years before the country achieved its national independence.³ Under British rule (from 1942 to 1957), all Malaysians were encouraged to use English as a medium of communication. As a language that holds an international economic status and also as a symbol of class, it naturally gained recognition from wider society, especially the non-Malays who resided in urban areas. Many non-Malays, the Chinese families in particular, decided to send their children to English-based schools while maintaining their mother tongue at home⁴.

³ Malaysia was granted independence from the British ruling government on August 31st, 1957.

⁴ Several popular English schools which attracted urban Chinese families include the Anglo-Chinese School, the Methodist Boys School and Bukit Nanas Convent.

In Malaysia, the Chinese form two groups based on their formal educational backgrounds. The former, mainly from rural areas, opted for traditional Chinese schooling curriculums and are well known as the Mandarin-educated group. The other group younger generation Chinese is normally English-educated. Compared to the Mandarin educated who can read and understand English, the English educated Chinese cannot read and understand Mandarin. Nowadays, it is common for English-educated Malaysian Chinese to converse in English in their daily social intercourse. This phenomenon is different from their counterparts in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Abdullah & Pederson, 2006)

Even after the country gained its national independence, the legacy of a British-based Constitution continues. Many of the Government's new policies, which are based on freedom of worship and education among the different races, have produced disparity within society. Segregation and polarization between ethnicities exist not only due to conflict in language use but also the way they perceive themselves as different in race and identity. This is different to the way Chinese present themselves in other Southeast Asia countries, such as Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. For instance, while the Chinese in Malaysia maintain their indigenous Chinese names and mother tongue (Abdullah & Pedersen, 2006) Chinese in Thailand, who also went through a similar immigration process⁵ as Chinese in Malaysia tend to "identify themselves as Thais and have adopted Thai names and embrace Buddhism" (Vaddhanaphuti, 2006; p.154). In the big picture, Chinese and other non-Malays were seen as groups of people who live in the Malay land and perceive themselves as Chinese and Indians respectively (Shafie, 2008).

In the 1970s the English Government schools were abolished and were replaced by the National (Malay) type of school or *Sekolah Kebangsaan*. The medium of instruction was changed from English to the Malay language. English is included in the curriculum as one subject lesson whilst the rest of the subjects are taught in the Malay language. All parents were encouraged to send their children to *Sekolah Kebangsaan* with the aim of integrating the younger generation under one national education system,

⁵ According to Vaddhanaphuti (2006), Siam, another name for Thailand has also welcomed a large number of Chinese immigrants to fill up labour demands in mining industries, construction and rice fields. Today, the Chinese in Thailand have gained control over businesses, particularly in banking and wholesale trading, similar to their Chinese counterpart in Malaysia.

as well as to introduce and establish the use of the Malay language across society as a step to achieve greater national unity. However, in order to show respect and tolerance to the other ethnicities and their need to preserve traditional culture for the younger generations, the Government has decided to retain vernacular schools which are based on Chinese and Tamil's oriented-education systems (normally referred to *Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan*). In these schools, learning *Bahasa Malaysia* is still compulsory and children are encouraged to be proficient in the Malay language.

The Government's decision to maintain the vernacular schools in the Malaysian education system with the aim of satisfying other ethnicities was seen as a gracious and decent action. However, uncertainties in national policy-making could be seen as one of the reasons why many of the efforts made to unite all races in the country have been far from successful. Thailand for example, under the rule of King Rama VI or King Vajiravidh in the early twentieth century, introduced a regulation to ban non-Thai schools in order to reduce the flow of Chinese immigration which was identified as a potential source of ethnic problems in the country.⁶ Unlike Thailand, the Malaysian Government, which tends to be more lenient, allows people an open choice and more toleration, but this has not been successful in encouraging national unity.

Because non-Malays are free to choose between English and Malay, they will certainly choose English because of its commercial value and ease of learning compared to the Malay language. Furthermore, *Bahasa Malaysia* itself is viewed as less commercial or valuable internationally. Therefore, non-Malays would certainly choose the language that propels them forward in preparation to face the world. In comparison to the Mandarin language, for instance, the Malay language is rather far behind in terms of global users. Even in Malaysia, the Malay language was seen as important only when dealing with Government departments, but it did not play a big role in most private sector employment. Increasingly in Malaysia, gaining proficiency in English and Mandarin languages has become a precondition to secure employment in private corporations owned by *non-Bumiputra* or non-Malays. With all these grounds, many people will choose the more practical languages which guarantee their future, rather than the Malay language that is seen only as a symbol of pride.

⁶ The Chinese has been identified by Thailand's nationalist king as the "Jews of the East" (Vaddhanaphuti, 2006; p.154).

The issue of vernacular schools is not exclusive. Many other initiatives, strategies and national policies recently made by the Government were seen to unconsciously undermine the status of the Malay language. In the year 2002⁷, for example, the Government changed a policy in the education system for Science and Mathematics to be taught in English⁸ with the reason given to speed up the process of acquiring a more knowledgeable workforce or human capital amongst the younger generation. This attracted various responses from the public, especially from Malay linguists, activists and intellectuals who questioned the status of the Malay language as a national language⁹. Also, the English language is freely and extensively used as an instruction medium in many private schools, institutions, colleges and some public universities, including the University Technology MARA¹⁰, the higher institution owned and initiated exclusively for the *Bumiputras* (the Malays and other indigenous people¹¹). In conjunction with the profound economic revolution towards a knowledge economy, billions of Ringgits have been spent on the development of the English language in the education environment, including computers and their English software and English laboratories as the medium of the Internet. In contrast, no significant efforts have been made to increase the status of the Malay language (Abdullah, 2010). Based on these reasons, it is argued that the Government was somehow trapped between the need to fortify the use of the English language for national development and the aims to sustain the status of the Malay language as a national privilege.

8.5 Nation and Nationalism

As earlier mentioned, the issue of language and different ways of life affiliated with diverse ethnic groups in Malaysia cannot merely be viewed as elements that keep the people apart. There are other underlying factors which play a significant role in

⁷ The policy was implemented in the year 2003.

⁸ This decision was made by the Government to ensure that Malaysia will not be left behind in an increasingly globalized world.

⁹ This led to a massive rally in Kuala Lumpur on 7 March 2009. Accordingly, the government has recently announced that this policy will be reversed in 2012 which means the teaching of both subjects will be reverted back to the Malay language.

¹⁰ MARA stands for *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* or Council of Trust for the *Bumiputra* of Malaysia.

¹¹ Other indigenous groups include those originating from Borneo, Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia. They include Kadazan, Iban, Budayuh, Melanau, Dayak and many more.

segregating society and affecting the process of nation building in the country. The problem of integrating different ethnic communities in Malaysia is enormous and complex. Malaysia, with its unique historical and political influences, evolves in its own way to determine national identity and nation building that is still to be fully achieved. Historically, there were three important factors which directly influenced the process of social solidarity: ethnicity, national identity and nationalism. Unfortunately, these three factors have always been used as a revival subject for every ethnic group to show communal strength. The way different groups perceive themselves in their own separate ways has consequently led to increasing tension amongst different ethnicities. Each of the ethnic groups tends to use their own traditions, values, norms, religions and languages as reasons to strengthen the “we” feeling amongst them. This echoes what Blumer (1969) claims that suspicion and mistrust will lead to the development of prejudice between ethnic groups. Currently, all groups, even though they manage to work together and live in peace, hold different aspirations, ambitions and hopes towards nationalism in Malaysia. This has clearly suggested by Boon Kheng (2004; pp.1-2) as follows:

“There are rival nationalisms pulling people into different directions. Malay ethno-nationalisms are still the strongest force in Malaysia, relying on Malay nationalist strategies and Islam to weld the Malay peoples together. Opposing it are the rival ethno-nationalisms of other indigenous groups, like the Dayaks and Kadazandusuns in Sarawak and Sabah, respectively. There is also the appeal of a multiethnic Malaysia nationalism, preferred by most Chinese and Indians citizens to weld peoples of all races and ethnic groups together into one united Malaysian nation, or Bangsa Malaysia.”

Even though Malaysia represents a model of multi-cultural society, the formation of its national identity is still endorsed by one particular ethnicity, that is the Malays. This has consequently raised strong feeling of dissatisfaction amongst the non-Malay groups. One of the reasons why the ethnic communities in Malaysia remain distinct is in part due to the fact that the Malaysian Constitution guarantees “special rights” to the Malays, and to the other *Bumiputras* or indigenous peoples. From the *non-Bumiputra*’s view, such action fosters communalism and simultaneously positions them (the non-Malays or *non-Bumiputra*) as second class citizens in Malaysia. Because the “special right” status and other privileges have been given only to the Malay indigenous groups,

it consequently allows the dominant ethnic group (the Malays) to use their cultural and political identities to shape the character of the state and hence the emerging nation (Boon Kheng, 2004). This form of “ethnic nationalism” (Ignatieff, 1994) sees many acts, practices and policy applications (which have been established since the country gained its independence in 1957) as preferential treatment for Malays and other *Bumiputra* communities.

Amongst the earliest issue concerning nationalism was the controversial “National Culture” concept introduced in the National Cultural Congress in 1971¹² (Saravannamuthu, 2004). As an independent nation-state, the Malaysian Government believed that the country should have its own national culture as a core foundation for building national solidarity and the idea to create one national culture was thought of as a strategy to integrate the diverse people who are divided by following their own cultural systems. The resolution made through the 1971 congress advanced prepositions:

- i. National Culture must be based on the indigenous (Malay) culture of this region.
- ii. Suitable elements from other cultures can be accepted as part of the national culture.
- iii. Islam is an important component in the molding of the national culture.

(Saravannamuthu, 2004; p.103)

All the above characteristics demonstrate the fact that the Malaysian National Culture is based on Malay traditions, with other ethnic cultural elements can be involved as long as they do not oppose the beliefs of Islam as the national religion. This in turn encountered fierce opposition and dissatisfaction from other ethnic communities, especially the Chinese and Indians, as they think that the Malaysian Government and policy makers undermined their rights as citizens as well as unequally included their cultural elements in the proposed concept of national culture. Furthermore, the idea to create such an Islamic country was fully rejected by the non-Malays, arguing that Malaysia not only belongs to the Malays but also to other ethnicities who are relatively

¹² This congress was sponsored by the Malaysian Government and a consequence of the May 13 1969 tragedy, which developed a climate of political wars in the country (Saravannamuthu, 2004).

complex, heterogeneous and distinctive in terms of status and roles, behavior and interactions, as well as social hierarchy (Hock Thye, 1986; Chew Peh, 1986). What is more important is that every ethnic group has their own cultural systems and other distinctive daily practices that should be taken into account in every national policy decision. For them, as a plural society, Malaysia's National Culture must reflect to the plurality of the people including a variety in languages used, religions, value systems, beliefs, traditions, education, economy, policy and others. As a tradition, culture cannot be forced or be stated as a regulation or law.

For the non-Malays, accepting a national culture which is based on only one particular cultural system may result in the destruction of their traditions and practices. One example was the case of the "lion dance" (Saravannamuthu, 2004; Boon Kheng, 2004), which was not accepted as an element of Malaysia's national culture because it was claimed to oppose Islamic belief. This further raised dissatisfaction amongst the Chinese because the lion dance is obviously one of their eminent cultural elements. As a matter of fact, in a plural society such as Malaysia, ethnic sensitivity is a big issue and cannot be easily neglected. Aspects like language, religion, tradition and values have been a symbol of honor, not only for the Malays but also for other ethnicities, the Chinese and Indians (Chew Peh, 1986). If the Malays are proud and strongly stand by their own cultures, so do the Chinese and Indians. For them, national culture must be able to be shared with everybody and should be a matter of national pride. Most importantly, national culture must mirror the daily practices of Malaysia's plural society. Hence, toleration is seen as a must in a plural society in Malaysia as it touches culture and identity. It is no use for the Government to embody a particular national culture if it is not supported or proud of other ethnicities. To change a culture is something that is difficult to pursue, not to mention to forget about it entirely.

The issue of accepting Malay culture as the dominant national culture has long distorted the spirit of integration amongst non-Malays. Other following issues such as the National Economic Policy (NEP), the National Development Policy (NDP) and the National Education Policy, which have been seen by non-Malay groups as privileges only Malays and other *Bumiputras* have, led to increasing tension between ethnic groups (see Chapter 1 for details). In light of this the decision made by most non-Malays in choosing English over the Malay language as a communication medium is

not only because English is a commercial language but also a sign of resistance against accepting Malay cultural elements. The dilemma surrounding the Malay language is based on the perception that language reflects a strong cultural element and particular ethnic nationalism. This echoes an argument made by Coleman and Cressey (1980, p.183), which suggests the challenge of integration in plural society is central in cultural matters:

“...integration is often resisted by members of ethnic groups who feel that their culture is superior, and by those who want to maintain their distinctive ethnic traditions. It is also opposed by minority citizen who are convinced that they will be at a disadvantage if they are forced to compete in a society that reflects the cultural assumptions of other ethnic groups. Although they would prefer to be treated as equals, they fear that integration would mean dominance.”

With respect to the concerning issue of language and national identity, an effort to enhance social capital and integration between ethnic communities in Malaysia may face a critical challenge. Considering language as core national issue, one could question how the imagined community, as suggested by Benedict Anderson (1983, 1991) may be presented in the mind and soul of all Malaysians. An imagined community constitutes a particular mental image of similarity among members of the nation. The question is how this similarity can exist if the people do not even share the same language? Malaysia clearly lacks this quality, thus any hope to bind the people as one nation towards creating an ideal imagined community remains questionable.

Despite Putnam's claim that social capital guarantees social benefit in society as a whole, the attempt to achieve bridging in a heterogeneous community is rather impossible to realize. In a plural society such as Malaysia, people need to have genuine interest in order to build relationships with each other. Just knowing people is not enough if they do not feel obliged to contribute and offer help. If people are going to help one another, they need to feel good about it and more importantly they need to feel that they have something in common with each other. Clearly, as shown in this study, anonymity in on-line communication does not help enough to erase the sense of difference amongst ethnic groups. The question to be asked is whether on-line communities do really help increase social capital and integration without having a common national language. Integration is not going to easily take place in a society

even with the assistance of new technology. As a matter of fact, in circumstances where trust is unpredictable and less reliable, people need more time to know each other better. Integration can only happen when people have the desire and make an effort and commitment towards it.

8.6 On-line Networks for Information Diffusion and Bridging the Generational Gap: Hope for the Future

The ability of on-line communities to provide a selection of types and goals has added an important and unique feature for the new emerging groups to become influential in the landscape of social communication and interaction. On-line communities can be seen as an appropriate channel for on-line ethnic communities in a plural society such as Malaysia. With the possibility of uniting people in virtual spaces that are based on shared issues and interests, on-line communities free individuals or groups from the restraints of geography and place-based existence (Hampton, 2002). Previously, spatial division was one of the factors that led to ethnic disintegration in the country (Ahmad & Syed Abdul Rashid, 2004).

All on-line communities, despite showing dissimilarities in their functions and purposes, have successfully contributed to the extensive transformation in the way social communication and interaction take place amongst their members. As revealed in the analysis of survey of members (in Chapter 7) these on-line communities were prominently enjoyed by every level of age group, particularly with young, educated and career oriented people who come from various socio-cultural backgrounds. Representing the embodiment of the active modern Malaysia, these people are at the forefront in the use and adoption of the Internet and, their networked lifestyles are well in tune with the fast information and communication technologies (ICTs) developed in the country.

Despite the fact that on-line-off-line interactions in this study raise several challenges in relation to the development of trust and reciprocity, they do not negate the presence of the elements of knowledge exchange, interaction and sharing ideas through on-line communication. More importantly, the circulation of information and communication did not occur only between different ethnicities but also across

generations. In many countries in the world, communication on-line has become a global trend, enjoyed by all sorts of age groups, from preschoolers to the elderly. Even though there is still a significant gap between the young and aged people access to the Internet in Malaysia, the division is increasingly narrowing, especially within urban dwellers and educated people. The Internet and the availability of on-line communities have completely transformed ways of accessing, processing and storing information for enhancing social and economic achievements. These provide the opportunity for all society members, with access to a computer, to find a huge amount of information at will and to take part in virtual discussions and post feedback contributing to knowledge growth.

There is no denying that new information and communication technologies have changed how different social groups communicate with and amongst each other. The new tools without doubt have provided people with faster and more reliable methods of communication that strengthen community networking. With the participation of mixed age groups in on-line communities, social networking enables the members to maintain contact across generations. In today's society, for instance, new relationships between family members, friends and work colleagues have been largely established through popular on-line networking sites such as "Facebook" and "Twitter". At the same time, e-mails and text messaging are widely used as a means for individuals or groups to reach one another. As the following quote from a grandmother of five, who shared her views and experiences of how technology reinforces everyday communication between her and young family members, noted:

"There was a huge difference between now and then. In my age, we do not have the Internet. Today, the Internet makes everything easier and faster. For example, if you are unable to visit your relatives, you can just make a call or say hi through the Internet as what my grandchildren always do. Today's generation is very lucky!"

(Malay Female, 62)

As mentioned earlier, the younger generation is more enthusiastic about on-line communication and they are certainly becoming a larger group who has access to the Internet. As most of the on-line members are youngsters (aged between 25 and 35 years) communication through virtual realms may potentially increase a sense of belonging amongst the new generation, perhaps helping them to develop a better

understanding about each other's differences, compared to their old folks. As Banerjee (2004) suggests, unlike Western and industrialized nations, the role of ICT media in Asia is not only seen as a catalyst for development but "as central tools for creating national unity and identity" (Banerjee, 2004; p.49).

Despite the challenges of cross-cultural differences demonstrated in this study, it can be argued that on-line networking that extends between different generations may still indicate some hope for future national unity in the country. The youth who began to link with other like-minded people will find common ground even though they may be different in terms of age and mind set. Parallel with the recent creation of 1Malaysia¹³ – a new national model for enhancing ethnic unity in the country – it is hoped that the ideology will help to achieve national unity and ethnic tolerance in the future. Through the slogan "People First, Performance Now" the model has been translated through a wide range of activities in order to promote deeper appreciation of Malaysia's cultural diversity. As illustrated in this study, positive action towards on-line mutual cooperation reflects individual's degrees of sharing responsibility and sincerity with their inter-generational on-line counterparts. Blood banks and money donations represent successful instances of cooperation by USJ and SARA on-line community members. These are two examples of how people can cooperate and collaborate towards positive outcomes for their communities. These experiences suggest that people can gain various advantages through on-line collaborations even though they do not have a sense of bonding to any long-term commitments. This, in the long run, might enhance feelings of unity amongst Malaysians with the possibility of achieving integration through mutual on-line networks by bridging the gap between the generational differences. Consider the following quote:

I do not think that this (integration through on-line networks) will happen in a short time. It will take sometimes to realize. Today (our perception) is still much influenced by our parents. However, this may no longer happen to the younger generation as through wider communication (on-line) they may develop their own understanding about others. I think the problem (of ethnic integration) will be solved by the next generation.

(Chinese Male, 28)

¹³ 1Malaysia was designed by Malaysia's 5th Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak on September 16, 2008.

8.7 Conclusion

The term “social capital” originated out of a discourse in developing community networks. In brief, it shows a cooperative model where people work with an underlying understanding that the more one knows, the more ties one holds in connecting with community members. In other words, social capital is seen as a way of conceptualizing the intangible resources of a community’s shared values and trust represented through our everyday relationships. The changing nature of social relationships resulting from advances in today’s new communication technology has brought about the idea of applying this concept within the context of on-line communities. As many research studies show (see for example, Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2002; Stone & Huges, 2002), virtual communities supplement and to some extent transform social capital rather than diminish it.

Social capital, as Bourdieu (1985) suggests, must involve durable obligations where individuals or groups possess a robust network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. Similarly, social capital according to Coleman (1990) represents a resource because it involves the expectation of reciprocity where relationships are governed by a high degree of trust and shared values. Furthermore, it involves a collective action which is based on routine, sustainability or wider networks and values which facilitate mutual collaboration. Applying this concept in light of on-line community practices in Malaysia indicates significant difference. In many ways, on-line networking does facilitate interactions between members but most of the basic elements, as suggested by the concept of social capital, such as trust and norms of reciprocity, have been contested by various socio-cultural issues. The different needs served by on-line community members, along with the fact that society is still much influenced by various cultural capitals, gender and class relations have arguably limited the way social capital can be developed across ethnic lines. Therefore, utilizing this concept in terms of on-line networking and socialization was actually a challenging and at times ambiguous process.

While social capital exists in the on-line medium, evidence gathered from this study has pointed out that bridging social capital is prevalent among all different ethnic groups in some on-line communities (FamilyPlace.com, MalaysiaMAYA.com and

SARA) when it comes to off-line relationships. While in three other communities (USJ Subang Jaya, PJNet and VirtualFriends.Net) bridging social capital in off-line meetings was not successfully formed. Bonding social capital, which developed within each different ethnic group, suggests that people who share similar values, language use and cultural practices tend to more easily interact with others who are like themselves. This echoes previous study that people from similar ethnic background tend to create a group bonding because they have a high level of trust towards each other (Ibrahim, et al., 2009). Social integration can exist only when there is constant interaction across all ethnic communities that will develop strong ties (Guest & Stamm, 1993) producing stability (Hendrix, 1976). However, the lack of trust which influences the formation of bridging and bonding social capital across the groups of different ethnicities may affect the process of integration. Even though the existence of the on-line medium does create opportunities to communicate and build respect for each other, the prevalence of ethnic enclaves, especially between the Malays and non-Malay groups, has somewhat diluted the effectiveness of off-line communities. This is due to the fact that ethnic integration and bridging social capital may only flourish under conditions where trust and reciprocity between groups is equally shared. However, given the variations in language use as well as different observations in religious and cultural practices, the possibility of reaching harmonious integration among the three ethnic groups – Malay, Chinese and Indians – remains challenging at best. All these factors obviously distort the development of trust and reciprocity, which are the core elements of “bridging” social capital to be formed across ethnic communities.

Chapter 9

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.0 My Research Questions

The research began with the aim of exploring whether or not on-line social networking affects forms of social integration amongst on-line ethnic community members (Malays, Chinese and Indians). As a country which is comprised of a society that has long been divided by ethnic, cultural and religious cleavages, the encouragement by the Government for all citizens to take part in on-line communities may offer new hope for inter-ethnic socialization. In a modest attempt to explore this issue, I developed four research questions that I thought would be useful for guiding the research. The first question seeks to uncover the underlying basis of the formulation of the national ICT policy, with special attention given to the growth and development of on-line communities. The second, third and fourth questions were intended to look at the promise of on-line social networks and social capital within the context of on-line heterogeneous communities. All the questions attempt to address the potential that on-line social networking may have for developing social capital, with a more specific interest in identifying the patterns of social capital (bonding or bridging) that emerge. These potential outcomes led into a broader final probe to determine whether they

might contribute to shaping the future of on-line communities, within the context of social integration and national unity.

My strategy for unpacking the above research questions was through a mixed method approach. This included face-to-face interviews with key research participants and a web-based survey. A total of 199 participants from four different groups were involved: eight administrators from six on-line communities, 162 members from the on-line communities, two Government representatives and 27 members of the general public drawn from multi-ethnic backgrounds. The analysis of the materials gathered from the fieldwork provided descriptions of experiences, perceptions and views of those research participants. This analysis produced four significant insights which are at the heart of this thesis.

9.1 The Four Research Insights

The first insight indicated that the building of on-line social networks between and across ethnic lines has the potential to develop both bridging and bonding social capital. The analysis of the administrators' views and the experiences of the on-line participants indicate interesting differences. This investigation has shown that the generation of social capital in Malaysian on-line ethnic communities is context dependent. Based on observations of the administrators, all six on-line communities involved in this study potentially developed three different patterns concerning bonding and bridging types of social capital. MalaysiaMAYA.com (social networking site), SARA (residential-based community) and FamilyPlace.com (parenting and children's community) were on-line communities that managed to create bridging social capital through both on-line and off-line activities. In contrast, two other on-line communities: USJ Subang Jaya (residential-based community) and PJNet (residential-based community) tended to show that bridging networks amongst different ethnic groups are only successful on-line (not off-line). VirtualFriends.net (social networking site) illustrates that on-line and off-line social networks across members developed only a bonding type of social capital, suggesting that on-line social networking benefits only a particular ethnic community (the Malays).

The analysis of the members' survey produced a positive response demonstrating that most members enjoy on-line social networking with their multi-ethnic counterparts, and that many of them claimed they managed to extend these relationships off-line. This acknowledges the function of on-line communities as an effective channel with the potential of creating bridging types of social capital across on-line ethnic communities.

The second insight suggests that while social capital exists in all on-line activities, empirical evidence derived particularly from the administrators views, has pointed out the challenge of transferring to an off-line medium the bridging networking and social capital developed on-line. As illustrated in two of the on-line communities in this study – USJ Subang Jaya and PJNet (see Chapter 6 for details) – the extension of on-line communication to off-line activities was not carried out systematically, which in turn failed to maintain social capital and integration across ethnic communities. This finding contradicts that of previous research studies (see for example Blanchard & Horan, 2000; Hampton & Wellman, 2002), which suggest that social capital between members will become even stronger when on-line activities are also continued off-line. As illustrated in this study, language use was highlighted as a significant factor that contributed to such failure. The use of the English language by the majority of non-Malay groups (Chinese and Indians) was said to be preventing ethnic Malays from being interested in participating in off-line meetings. VirtualFriends.net, where the majority of members are Malay, had a higher tendency to communicate in Malay and attracted less participation from ethnic Chinese and Indians who are more comfortable communicating in English. However, language appears to be less problematic for the on-line participants from on-line communities that are able to maintain on-line and off-line social relationships. Here, the equal distribution of members in on-line communities becomes important, as fluidity of language identity emerged when no particular group dominated the communication process.

The third insight suggests that trust and reciprocity is weaker in heterogeneous communities, even in the presence of new forms of communication fully supported by new technology and applications. The advantages of anonymity provided by on-line communication have not played a significant role in integrating people. The fact that people still value their face-to-face interaction has positioned the importance of trust “as the basis of social order” (Fukuyama, 1995; p.25). This study found that issues such as

class, national identity, cultural differences, as well as distinctive religious observations, were contributing factors that limited the personal trust between different ethnic groups, especially when they met their on-line friends off-line.

Trust is important as it determines the sustainability of social relationships. In order for people to make connections with others, for the purpose of mutual cooperation, knowing about each other's social and cultural background is indispensable. Further, trust is needed to ensure that in any cooperation, exploitation and suspicion do not occur. The fact that ethnic communities in Malaysia are perceived to be different in their ways of life, with different perceptions and beliefs, has challenged the development of trust towards their social engagement with people from other ethnic groups and thus, more valuable relationships have not been achieved. Even though in the on-line communities all ethnic groups managed to interact and communicate, the fact that some still appreciate that interpersonal and physical judgements are necessary before giving their trust to others. However, this is not always the case as suggested in previous study that trust does not necessarily play a significant role when people get together for achieving similar goals at communal level (Ibrahim et al., 2009).

Negative reactions towards off-line gathering and activities occurred in on-line communities such as USJ Subang Jaya and PJNet and showed that social capital in diverse communities is shaped and limited by people's lack of trust. This finding verifies previous claims by researchers such as Knack and Keefer (1997) and Alesina and La Ferrara (2000) regarding social capital development in heterogeneous communities. They argued that people tend to have more trust and feel comfortable interacting with those who are similar to themselves. In mixed ethnic communities such as Malaysia, each group is likely to develop strong social connections and generalized trust amongst themselves, thus strengthening a bonding form of social capital. At the same time, these tend to avoid or distinguish members from other groups, reflecting the generalized distrust towards others, which leads to the disruption of bridging social capital (Portes, 1998). As these two communities have indicated that there is a language issue across the members, it is important to highlight here that the problem of trust was also associated with the language used in on-line and off-line communication.

Many scholars have suggested that on-line social networking should be seen as part of a wider set of relationships and norms that make it possible for people to pursue their goals and also serve to bind society together. However, this is not enough to provide a suitable medium for enhancing interaction between ethnic groups since the reciprocity and trust that is developing in the on-line medium seems to be disrupted by the elements of cultural capital that are encountered in face-to-face meetings. Therefore, the existence of on-line communities in Malaysia may, at best, help to attract and bring together people from different groups to communicate and interact with each other, but the extent of integration is as yet, uncertain. In some circumstances, integration might exist but this is more in the form of bridging social capital across only “certain” ethnic groups. Such a pattern, even though it gives a relatively new dimension to social solidarity, does not provide an adequate basis for the national aspiration to integrate all three ethnic communities.

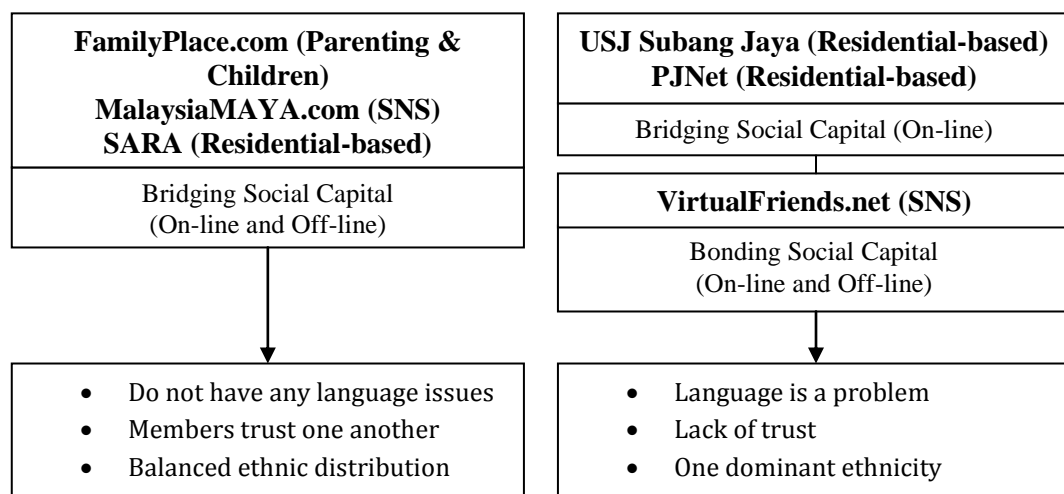


Figure 9.1: On-line Communities and Factors Associated with the Formation of Bonding and Bridging Social Capital

The central argument in this study is that the role of on-line communities in the context of multi-ethnic societies can be seen as both a channel for mutual collaboration as well as potentially a new medium for ethnic polarization. This has consequences for the potential of on-line networking as a new catalyst to enable inter-ethnic integration in Malaysia. Four quotes from the general public provide some ideas about the future of on-line communities from the point of view of Malaysian people themselves:

“Well...to me Malaysia is not yet ready to integrate the people through online communities. It will take a long time to get it successful. For me even in online communities they are still with their own groups. I have yet to see the online communities group which is multiracial. They are on their own type, their own group. Even Chinese, they have their own Hokkien groups and all that. I think it is going to be difficult because online people are very artificial. They are not face to face with that person, I mean they are free to say whatever they want...somehow Malaysian tend to be very fake! Well even though they meet face-to-face, so far when racial integration is concerned, I don't think it will happen. I don't have the data or statistic but I just don't think so!

(Indian Male, 39)

“...I think finding and making friends in a real life is better than on-line because it could be dangerous! I do not like it seriously! Because on the Internet we do not know their true identities...If I make friends on-line, it will be limited only to on-line communication, definitely no face-to-face meeting. It is dreadful!

(Chinese Female, 18)

“Internet relationships are different than real relationships. For me, it is always not the same. Even though we are close online we are not necessarily close in a real world. Ethnic integration could possibly happen through on-line communities but the members must show a high commitment towards the communities he/she bonded to. Also, their perceptions towards on-line friends when they communicate and interact on-line and off-line must be the same. Then integration can happen.”

(Malay Male, 25)

“...In 10 years time I think it still maintains the same. It is up to people attitude to go to join the online community or not. Some they do not bother to join because they have their own circulation of friends. Although they have made friends online, they just go in to chit chat, say hi and bye, give some opinion and after that, they went back to their real friends.”

(Indian Male, 34)

The fourth insight concerns the general understanding of new policies and social change in Malaysia. It is important to note here that the formulation of ICT policy by the Government can be seen as a blueprint that provides useful guidelines for social engineering. The Government sees ICTs as effective agents that can transform society into a better nation. However, as Banarjee (2004) asserts, processes of social

engineering have always been confronted by various negative sentiments and challenges. Whether we agree or not, such a process is essential to the survival of the nation. Being excluded from the mainstream of transformational waves is believed to be one of the damaging forms of exclusion within a global economy and culture (Castell, 1996). Even though the hope of building inter-ethnic relationships is still uncertain, the necessity and roles of ICTs for maintaining social stability should not be neglected. Reciprocity of knowledge is crucial for engaging in today's globalized world. Further, the growing culture of knowledge and information exchange across Malaysian society thus far is a promising sign for the nation, enabling it to achieve the status of a developed country and knowledge economy/society in the years ahead.

9.2 What is Next?

The importance of cultural capital alongside social capital has demonstrated that difficulties can arise interfering in trust relationships, and that this does limit the sustainability of off-line relationships. The data produced from the mixed methodology approach I adopted in this study has led to the conclusion that has been identified. The limitations of the methodology have been that it has produced findings which rest upon conflicting points of view, evident from people's experiences and attitudes as they were expressed by different groups of participants. The inferences from these conflicting points of view indicate the inadequacy of the current research approach because it has not been possible to fully address all the issues that have emerged, such those around language, culture and religion.

The findings in this study involve subjective interpretation and since the context is closely related to the researcher (considering the subject is about ethnicity) it is, therefore, difficult to maintain objectivity. Although effort was made to avoid making personal judgements, it is inevitable that to some extent the researcher's values will be reflected in the kind of data sought and the sense made of it. This is an issue in all research, and these ongoing debates involve challenges for many research studies to mainstream theories and for the type of objectivist and subjectivist knowledge arguments. This is likely to be an ongoing and difficult methodological issue.

In order to move from these conflicting issues of knowledge, an ethnographic method may offer a better way to get richer information about the research subject. By selecting an ethnographic strategy, the researcher would have a greater understanding of human experience and relationships within a social system that involves a diverse culture. Given the issues that arose in this current research around the need for more transparency, experiences and “true” observations, ethnography could serve as a better method for future research into on-line communities. This would provide an opportunity to conduct synchronous interviews, followed by a period of participating in on-line and off-line activities. It could improve the researcher’s knowledge and representations of the context and participants. It is recognized that this requires more complex processes and strategies, and it is also time consuming. As found in this research, the issue of trust that arose challenged the way on-line interviews and focus groups would need to be undertaken.

The analysis of the research suggests uncertainty that social integration and national unity will be developed through on-line social networking. Some of the important issues that have been noted, however, could not be fully explored in detail because the scope of the study only led to discovering part of the process. Also, there was not sufficient information sought in some cases as this research was exploratory in nature. Cultural capital emerged as having a significant role in shaping the type of social capital that determines social integration. Scanlon (2004) suggests that social capital becomes problematic when divorced from more fundamental notions of community and broader factors such as class, gender, ethnicity and race that impact on social relations. As shown in this study, a failure to develop bridging forms of social capital across ethnic communities supports the idea that elements of trust and reciprocity may not be enough to build social capital through only on-line interactions. Therefore, more “in-depth” research into the dynamic of cultural capital and its relationship with the formation of social capital in on-line communities is needed. A new study may consider doing more grounded individual research into one of the on-line communities that has been used in this research. Conversations with the administrators and participants could be continued in more detail, and taking part in on-line activities may increase profound understanding of the issues that have emerged in this current research.

The research findings also demonstrate that simply giving people a new technology and communicative tool does not mean that this can change everything. Instead, technology might only serve as a device to fulfil certain human needs. Many other things in human life are unable to be solved solely through technology because it will be necessary to confront people's cultural practices before any change can happen. ICTs, even though they have become an increasingly important part of human life, have not as yet proven to be an instant solution to deep-rooted racial, linguistic, religious and cultural divisions in the country. Different ethnic groups remain and align themselves with ethnic-based communalism and they are still significantly influenced by different cultural assumptions. Thus, despite the increasing use of ICTs, inter-racial suspicions and tensions still serve as a stumbling block for efforts to foster national unity and social integration along the lines of ethnicity.

In light of the fact that the Government is enthusiastically putting more effort into positioning the country in line with the industrialized nations, questions of how technologies may contribute to the formation of national identity and knowledge diffusion across society remain. The introduction of various information technology agendas, and more investment in ICT infrastructures to increase information and knowledge, is seen as a significant contribution to broadening Malaysian people's understanding about today's global world and the need to be included in mainstream knowledge-based societies and economies. However, this is not sufficient as having a technological advance without concern for social and cultural factors may create doubts about individual life and also for the future of the nation. The question remains whether new emerging media such as 'Facebook' and 'Second Life' will bring about change or add a new dimension in relation to the issues of on-line networking, social capital and cultural capital, which have been identified in this current research. Will these new emerging media encourage more on-line activities and socialization in a way that will contribute towards social integration and national unity, or will they simply replace the existing technologies and create a new socio-technological dilemma for the nation to deal with?

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Appendix 5A

Semi-structured Interview Questions for On-line Communities' Administrators

Objective 1: To obtain their awareness about Malaysia's ICT policy and whether the policy has had an influence on the decision to form the on-line communities.

- 1) Could you please introduce yourself?
 - a. Some personal background
- 2) Are you aware of Malaysia's ICT policy?
 - a. If yes,
 - i. How do you know about the policy?
 - ii. What is the policy about based on your own knowledge?
 - iii. Why do you think the government has introduced the ICT policy?
 - iv. Do you think that the ICT policy has had any impact on society as a whole?
 - b. If no, why?

Objective 2: To examine why they decided to form an on-line communities and how it was started;

- 3) Are you aware about the DAGS program?
 - a. If yes,
 - i. Has your on-line community been funded by DAGS?
 - If yes, could you please describe your experience dealing with DAGS
 - If no, why did you decide not to take the incentive offered by DAGS?
 - b. If no,
 - i. Why do you think that you do not have information about DAGS?
 - ii. Who funded the formation of your on-line community?
- 4) Could you please describe more about your on-line community?
 - a. Why did you decide to form such a community?

- b. What aspect did you value the most when you first decided to set up your on-line community?
- c. How do you feel to be an on-line community member?

Objective 3: To explore their experiences in conducting and managing the on-line communities, especially in the context of members' social relations on-line and off-line.

5) Have you had any problems when managing your on-line community so far?

- a. If yes,
 - i. Could you please describe what the problem was?
 - ii. How did you manage to solve the problem?
- b. If no,
 - i. How do you manage to maintain the situation/condition?

6) Do you think that your on-line community has so far achieved the community objective?

- a. If yes,
 - i. Why do you think so?
 - ii. Do you have any indicators to measure the achievements?
- b. If no, why?

Ob4: To obtain their views about the impact of on-line communities in the context of social relations and national unity.

7) Currently, there are more on-line communities that arise independently than funded by the government.

- a. Why do you think that is so?

8) Do you think that the growth of on-line communities in Malaysia has had any impact on society?

- a. If yes,
 - i. To what extent do you think on-line communities affect:
 - Inter-ethnic relationships

- National unity in the future

ii. How?

iii. How do you perceive the effects?

b. If no, why?

9) How do you see the development of on-line communities in Malaysia in 10 years time?

Appendix 5B

Semi-structured Interview Questions for Government Representatives

Objective 1: To examine why they decided to formulate the ICT policy.

- 1) Why did the Malaysian Government decide to introduce the ICT policy?
- 2) How are the decisions about the ICT policy made?
 - a. Who initiated the idea of the policy?

Objective 2: To obtain their views about the significance of ICT policy for society as a whole.

- 3) To what extent do you think the members of the public understand the policy?
 - a. Why?
 - b. How do you think the public has reacted to the policy? Why?
- 4) Has the Government undertaken any specific measures to make people aware of the ICT policy?
 - a. If yes,
 - i. What has been done?
 - ii. How has it been done?
 - b. If no, why?
- 5) Has consideration of social impacts been taken into account in formulating and implementing the policy, especially in the National Information Technology Agenda (NITA)?
- 6) Do you think that NITA has made any impact on social development?
 - a. If yes,
 - i. How? (please give details)
 - ii. What aspects of social development have been significantly impacted?
 - b. If no, why?

Objective 3: To examine why they encouraged the formulation of on-line communities in Malaysia.

- 7) DAGS is one of the initiatives created under NITA to support the development of on-line community in Malaysia.
 - a. Could you please describe more about DAGS?
- 8) The Government has invested a lot of money in supporting the development and the formation of on-line community in Malaysia.
 - a. Could you please describe why on-line communities seem so important in the context of national development?

Objective 4: To obtain their views about the impact of on-line communities in the context of social relationships and national unity in Malaysia's plural society.

- 9) Currently, there are more on-line communities that arise independently than dependant on Governments grants.
 - a. Why do you think this is so?
- 10) Do you think that the growth of on-line communities in Malaysia has had any impact on society?
 - a. If yes,
 - i. To what extent do you think on-line communities shape:
 - Inter-ethnic relationships?
 - National unity in the future?
 - ii. How? (please give details)
 - iii. How does the Government perceive the effects?
 - iv. Has the Government undertaken any initiatives to assess the impact on ICT policy on society, especially in the context of on-line communities? (please give details)
 - b. If no, why?
- 11) Are you a member of any on-line community?
 - a. If yes, how do you feel about being an on-line community member?

Appendix 5C

Semi-structured Interview Questions for the General Public

Objective 1: To obtain their awareness about Malaysia's ICT policy.

- 1) Could you please introduce yourself?
 - a. Some personal background
 - b. Do you have experience using the Internet?
 - i. If yes,
 - What you normally do when using the Internet?
 - Tell me your views about the Internet
 - ii. If no, why?
- 2) Are you aware of Malaysia's ICT policy?
 - a. If yes,
 - i. How do you know about the policy?
 - ii. Why do you think the Government introduced the ICT policy?
 - iii. Do you think the ICT policy has had any impact on society as a whole?
 - b. If no, why?

Objective 2: To examine why they did not become members of on-line communities.

- 3) Have you heard of on-line communities?
 - a. If yes,
 - i. Are you aware about.....(mentioned particular name of on-line community)
 - If yes, are you the member of the on-line community?
 - If yes, ask the person to fill out the questionnaire for the on-line community members.
 - If no, why you are not willing to become a member of the on-line community?

- b. If no, go to the next question.

Objective 3: To explore their experiences of social integration with other ethnicities off-line.

- 4) Do you have any friends from other ethnic groups?
- a. If yes,
 - i. Are they your close friends?
 - b. If no,
 - i. Why do you think you do not have friends from other ethnic groups?
 - ii. Are you interested in making friends with other ethnic groups?
 - If yes, why?
 - If no, why?
- 5) Give your personal views about inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia today.

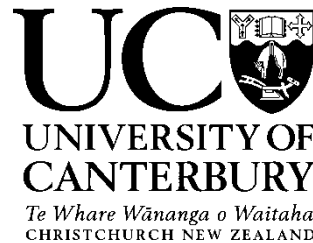
Objective 4: To obtain their personal views about the possible impact of social integration on-line and the future of on-line communities in the context of social integration and national unity in Malaysia.

- 6) On-line communities provide a lot of opportunities for meeting different people virtually (researcher describing more about the nature of an on-line community).
- a. Do you think that the growth of on-line communities in Malaysia has had any impact on society?
 - i. If yes,
 - To what extent do you think on-line communities affect:
 - Inter-ethnic relationships
 - National unity in the future
 - How?
 - How do you perceive the effects?
 - ii. If no, why?
- 7) If you had a chance, would you be interested in becoming a member of an on-line community?
- a. If yes,

- i. How do you manage to do that?
- b. If no, why?

Appendix 5D

On-line Survey Questionnaire



SURVEY ON SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN MALAYSIAN ON-LINE COMMUNITIES

Thank you for participating in this survey.

This study seeks to collect data on your experience of and attitudes to participating in an on-line community. All responses are anonymous.

Introduction

On-line communities (also known as electronic, virtual or cyber communities) are a group of people communicating with each other through a new medium of information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet.

The existence of these communities could potentially create new social trends affecting social cohesion in Malaysia. This study will assess the impact of on-line social networks on social integration in Malaysia's plural society.

Important Note:

You may be a member of several different on-line communities. Please answer all questions and complete this survey ONLY based on your attitudes and your own experiences with the on-line community NAMED in the invitation letter.

Section A: About You**1. Ethnicity**

- ☐ Malay
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Indian
- ☐ Other (please specify)

2. Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

3. Age

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18 to 25
- ☐ 26 to 35
- ☐ 36 to 45
- ☐ 46 to 55
- ☐ 56 and above

4. Highest education level

- ☐ SRP/PMR
- ☐ SPM
- ☐ STPM
- ☐ Matriculation
- ☐ Certificate
- ☐ Diploma
- ☐ Bachelor Degree
- ☐ Master Degree
- ☐ PhD.
- ☐ Post Doctoral

5. Occupation

- ☐ High school student
- ☐ University student
- ☐ Government servant
- ☐ Private worker
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Unemployed

6. Location

- ☐ Perlis
- ☐ Kedah
- ☐ Pulau Pinang
- ☐ Perak
- ☐ Selangor
- ☐ Within Klang Valley or Kuala Lumpur
- ☐ Negeri Sembilan
- ☐ Melaka
- ☐ Johor
- ☐ Pahang
- ☐ Terengganu
- ☐ Kelantan
- ☐ Sarawak
- ☐ Sabah

7. Please specify the place or region you live in (e.g.: Gombak, Kota Bharu, Kuala Kangsar)

Section B: On-line Activities

8. How long have you been connected to the Internet?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ More than 1 year

9. Where do you usually get access to the Internet?

- ☐ At home
- ☐ In the office or workplace
- ☐ At school
- ☐ Internet cafés
- ☐ Libraries
- ☐ Wi-Fi hot spots (public Internet kiosk, public access terminal or web payphone)

- At a friend's house

10. What sort of connection do you have?

- Dial-up / Modem
- Broadband
- I don't know
- Other (please specify)

11. How many hours per day do you access the Internet?

- Less than 1 hour
- More than 1 hour

12. Generally, how frequently do you access the Internet?

- Everyday
- Randomly

13. Please select up to 10 of the most important reasons for your access to the Internet

- To search for new information and knowledge
- To find new friends
- To play on-line games
- To send and receive e-mail
- To communicate with others in chat rooms, forums, blogs etc.
- To communicate with others through 3G or 4G technology
- To listen to e-music
- To be involved in political debates
- To get access to e-government
- To watch videos or stream TV
- To create and update your own Weblog/Blog
- To advertise for new business
- To create your own or particular societies or clubs
- To create and/or be a member of an on-line community
- To carry out paid work (tele-working)
- To use on-line banking and pay bills on-line
- To use video conferencing or webcam communication
- Other (please specify)

14. How long have you used the Internet to communicate with other people (e.g., sending e-mails, chatting, blogging etc.)?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ More than 1 year
- ☐ Never

15. Please describe what you like best about using the Internet.

16. Please describe what you do not like about using the Internet.

Section C: On-line Community Details

17. How did you learn about/know of this on-line community? (You can choose more than one).

- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Relatives
- ☐ Internet advertisement
- ☐ Seminar or conference
- ☐ Magazine article
- ☐ Local newspaper
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ Television
- ☐ Local advert
- ☐ I can't remember

18. When was your on-line community created?

- ☐ Less than 1 year ago
- ☐ More than 1 year ago
- ☐ I don't know
- ☐ If you know the actual date/year, please specify

19. Who funded the creation of this community website?

- ☐ Government
- ☐ Private/Individual
- ☐ Collective
- ☐ I don't know
- ☐ Other (please specify)

20. How long have you participated in this on-line community?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ More than 1 year

21. Please give your 5 most important reasons for joining this on-line community?

- ☐ To gain new experience as an on-line community member
- ☐ To search for/share new information and knowledge with others
- ☐ To find new friends and create networks
- ☐ To share interests with others
- ☐ To help and to get help from other people
- ☐ To be part of a local community
- ☐ To have fun
- ☐ To expand business networks
- ☐ Other (please specify)

22. What is your role in this community?

- ☐ Community founder
- ☐ Community core committee
- ☐ Ordinary member

23. Overall, how many on-line communities do you belong to?

- ☐ One
- ☐ More than one

Section D: Networking Communication

24. How often do you visit the community website?

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ More than once a week
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ More than once a month
- ☐ Randomly

25. How many hours per visit do you spend on the community website?

- ☐ Less than 1 hour
- ☐ More than 1 hour

26. Have you ever asked for any information from your on-line community members?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (go to question 29)

27. Normally, do you get the information you need?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (go to question 29)

28. Do you trust the information you get from your on-line community members?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

29. Do you provide information?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (go to question 31)

30. If you do, what kinds of information interest you the most? (Please describe)

31. How often do you have direct communication on-line (on-line chatting) with other community members?

- ☐ Every time I enter the community website
- ☐ Only if I find recognized members on-line
- ☐ Randomly based on my interest or mood
- ☐ Never (go to question 34)

32. If you do, who are the people you chat with regularly?

- ☐ A friend I know and have met personally
- ☐ A friend I just know in the on-line community

33. If you do, what do you like to chat about on-line the most? (e.g.: entertainment, current issues, politics) (Please describe)

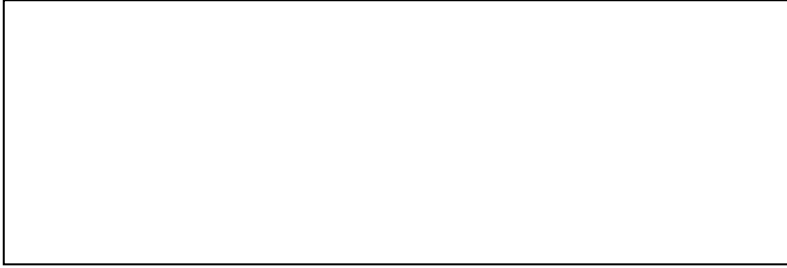
34. What language do you most frequently use in your on-line activities?

- ☐ Malay language
- ☐ Chinese language
- ☐ English language
- ☐ Other language (please specify)

35. Do you think an on-line community is a medium to exchange useful or fruitful information?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

36. What are the benefits of belonging in this on-line community? (Please describe)



Section E: On-line Social Networks

37. Is it easy to communicate with people in the on-line community?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

38. Have you made new friends since participating in this on-line community?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

39. Do you think ethnicity is important when you communicate within the on-line community?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

40. Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

41. Does belonging to an on-line community extend your business networks and work opportunities?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

42. Have your social activities increased with people from other ethnicities since you participated in this on-line community?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

43. Has interacting with people on-line changed your feelings about interacting with people from other ethnic groups off-line? (Please describe)

Section F: Social Integration

For question 44 to 46 please indicate your degree of agreement /disagreement with the views given.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Agree to a limited extent	Disagree	Strongly disagree
44. I find that the Internet is a new and useful medium of communication that can bring people closer.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
45. In on-line community everybody is free to communicate, give an opinion and make friends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
46. My on-line community is the best place to connect to people from various social and ethnic groups.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section G: National Policy on ICTs

47. National Vision 2020 or *Wawasan 2020* was launched in 1991 by the former Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Mahathir Mohamad.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

48. National Vision 2020 or *Wawasan 2020* has nine prime challenges.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

49. Most of the challenges that have been set out in National Vision 2020 or *Wawasan 2020* are focused on social development and national unity.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

50. ICT policy in Malaysia was launched by the Malaysian government in 1994.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

51. The Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) and The National Information Technology Agenda (NITA) are two prime initiatives of Malaysia's ICT policy.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

52. The National Information Technology Agenda (NITA) vision is "to utilize ICTs to transform all of Malaysian society into an information society, then to a knowledge society and finally to a value-based knowledge society".

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

53. Have you had any interesting experiences you would like to share since you became an on-line community member? (Please describe)

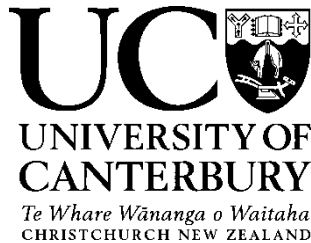
If you wish to be entered into the prize draw, please give your details (so we can contact you)

Name :
Email Address :
Phone Number :

Thank you for your time and assistance in completing this questionnaire.

Appendix 5E

Invitation Letter to On-line Communities' Administrators



School of Sociology and Anthropology
 College of Arts
 Tel: +64 3 364 2976, Fax +64 3 364 2977, www.soci.canterbury.ac.nz

[Date]

[Name and Address]

Dear [Name]

An Invitation to Participate in an Interview as Part of a Study of On-line Social Networks

My name is Wan Munira Binti Wan Jaafar, a PhD student at the School of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

I am writing to invite you to participate in my PhD research interviews that I am planning to conduct during mid August through to late October 2008. This involves completing a semi-structured interview, which will only take about one hour, at the most.

Briefly, my PhD research focuses on the possible impact of on-line social networks on social integration among on-line community members. The aim of this interview is to explore your experience in conducting and managing an on-line community, as well as to acquire your personal views on social integration on-line.

In addition to interviews, I will conduct a web-based survey as a part of the research requirement. Therefore, I would like to ask your permission to use your on-line community members as participants. The survey aims to collect data on the experience and attitudes of on-line community members towards participation in such communities. I will guarantee the anonymity of the participants in the survey and no sensitive questions will be asked or directly relate to your on-line community. You may view the questionnaire if you wish.

Due to your role as the founder of the prominent **[name of particular on-line community]** on-line community in Malaysia, I would appreciate if you could spare some of your precious time for this interview and hope that you will consider granting permission for me to conduct a web-based survey on your on-line community members.

I also attach some additional documents relating to this research for your perusal. If you have any queries about my research or the interview, please do not hesitate to contact me at: wmj16@student.canterbury.ac.nz / wanmunira07@yahoo.com or via the contact details below.

The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and has received a Letter of Approval 'On Conducting Research in Malaysia' from the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), Prime Minister's Department of Malaysia.

Your attention and co-operation is highly appreciated. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

.....
WAN MUNIRA BINTI WAN JAAFAR
c/o: JSKP, Fakulti Ekologi Manusia
Universiti Putra Malaysia
43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor.
Tel: 03 89467156 / 013 9386027
Fax: 03 89467894

Appendix 5F

Invitation Letter to Government Representatives



School of Sociology and Anthropology
 College of Arts
 Tel: +64 3 364 2976, Fax +64 3 364 2977, www.soci.canterbury.ac.nz

[Date]
 [Name and Address]
 Dear [Name]

An Invitation to Participate in an Interview as Part of a Study of On-line Social Networks

My name is Wan Munira Binti Wan Jaafar, a PhD student at the School of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

I am writing to invite you to participate in my PhD research interviews that I am planning to conduct during mid August through to late October 2008. This involves completing a semi-structured interview, which will only take about one hour, at the most.

Briefly, my PhD research focuses on the possible impact of on-line social networks on social integration amongst on-line community members. The aim of this interview is to understand the Government's policy towards on-line communities and to explore the Government's views on the relevance of on-line communities in the context of social integration and national unity in Malaysia.

Due to your role as a prominent contributor to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) policy making in Malaysia, I would appreciate if you could spare some of your precious time for this interview. I also attach some additional documents relating to this research for your perusal. If you have any queries about my research or the interview, please do not hesitate to contact me at: wmj16@student.canterbury.ac.nz or via the contact details below.

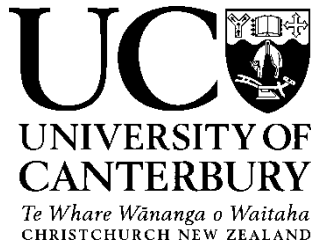
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Your attention and co-operation is highly appreciated. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

.....
WAN MUNIRA BINTI WAN JAAFAR
c/o: JSKP, Fakulti Ekologi Manusia
Universiti Putra Malaysia
43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor.
Tel: 03 89467156 / 013 9386027 / Fax: 03 89467894

Appendix 5G Information Sheet



School of Sociology and Anthropology
College of Arts
Tel: +64 3 364 2976, Fax +64 3 364 2977, www.soci.canterbury.ac.nz

INFORMATION SHEET

You are invited to participate in the research project entitled “On-line Networks, Social Capital and Social Integration: A Case Study of On-line Communities in Malaysia”.

About the Research

During the past few years, advances in computing technology, especially the Internet, have affected the way social networks have worked to connect people. Since the emergence of on-line networks within communities, there is a vast array of topics that have been studied related to social network theory and social capital. One of the major issues of concern is the impact of social networks and social capital on on-line communities. Based on past research studies (see Pinkett, 2003; Hampton & Wellman, 2001; Ferlander, 2003), on-line networks have been seen as a potential solution to unite societies, produce social capital and create a robust social relationships among members on-line and off-line.

Briefly, this new research aims to explore the possible impact of on-line social networks on social integration among Malaysia’s on-line community members. The research objectives are:

1. To examine the rational for the formulation of Malaysia’s ICT policy and the promotion of on-line communities.
2. To study the function of on-line communities in the context of a multi-ethnic society.
3. To analyze how on-line networks create social capital among diverse on-line community members.
4. To describe the potential of on-line networks and social capital for shaping the future of on-line communities within the context of social integration and national unity in Malaysia.

Historically, the problems of inter-ethnic integration, class relations and gender are of much concern in Malaysia because they are often regarded as threats to national unity and the welfare of the people. For a long-time, the Government has been making great efforts to overcome these problems, but the dilemma remains. In 1996, the Malaysian Government formed its first national ICT policy intending to promote information and communication technologies (ICTs) to society. The implementation of the policy seems to have been successful with increasing numbers of the Internet users and also the existence of a variety of on-line communities in Malaysia. As a result, the Malaysian people are now starting to use ICTs as a new way of interacting.

Relating to these circumstances, encouraging social integration between different groups in Malaysia could be seen from a relatively new perspective. This new research, therefore, is designed to explore the contribution that on-line communities may be able to make to generate and maintain social capital within Malaysia's plural society. It is also intended to understand the potential of, and the resistance to the way that technologies are adopted and integrated into different social and cultural settings. Personally, I believe that this study is important since it helps us to better understand how and why we interact with each other, as well as how technology can alter this interaction. Therefore, this research will give an understanding of how people manage their relationship with mutual trust across a multi-cultural background.

Research Information

Your involvement in this project either as an interviewee or web-based survey participant is on a voluntary basis, and you have the right to withdraw from the project at any time, including the withdrawal of any information provided. You may check and review the interview questions before you take part in this research.

Participation may pose risks such as anonymity and confidentiality, data transcription issues, data storage and retention. Please note that the interviews will be audio-taped and the survey will be conducted on-line using on-line survey software 'SurveyMonkey'. The recorded interviews and statistical analysis for the web-based surveys will be transcribed and analyzed by the researcher herself. If a professional transcriber is engaged, the researcher will make sure that he/she will be bound by the same confidentiality agreements. The confidentiality and anonymity of all the data provided will be strictly maintained. As this research is conducted for a PhD thesis, it is important to inform you that the supervisors of this project may also be authorized to access all the data.

All data will be securely stored in a safe place. The researcher will make sure it is kept securely and the confidentiality of the data is respected. Any notes, audio recordings, transcripts and other related documents will be confidential and stored securely in accordance with Canterbury University policy. However, you should be aware that any information provided via the electronic medium is not fully guaranteed to be secure.

The results of the research may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation; the identity of participants will not be made public without their consent. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the researcher may use pseudonyms to disguise the identity of participants. Copies of any publications produced from the research output will be offered to you if requested.

The project is being carried out as a requirement of PhD. (Sociology) degree by Wan Munira binti Wan Jaafar under the supervision of Professor David C. Thorns and Dr. Nabila Jaber, who can be contacted at the details below:

Prof. David. C. Thorns
E-mail: david.thorns@canterbury.ac.nz
Tel. No.: + 64 3 3642168 ext 6168

Dr. Nabila Jaber
E-mail: nabila.jaber@canterbury.ac.nz
Tel/ No.: + 64 3 3667001 ext 6053

The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and has received a Letter of Approval 'On Conducting the Research in Malaysia' from the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), Prime Minister's Department of Malaysia.

We thank you for your participation in this project.

Kind regards,

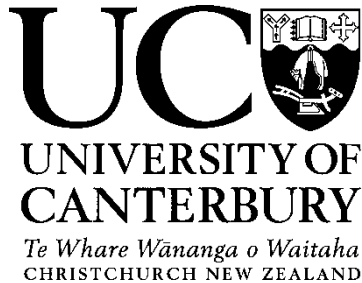
.....
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PhD. Candidate (Sociology)
School of Sociology and Anthropology
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Private Bag 4800
Christchurch 8140
New Zealand.
Ph: + 603 3642987 ext 4957
E-mail: wmj16@student.canterbury.ac.nz

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- Pinkett, R. (2003). Community Technology and Community Building: Early Results from the Creating Community Connections Project. *The Information Society*. Vol 19. pp. 365-379.
- Hampton, K. and Wellman, B. (2001). Long distance community in the network society. *American Behavioural Scientist*. Vol 45 (3), pp. 476-495
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Appendix 5H

Consent Form for Interview Participants



School of Sociology and Anthropology
 College of Arts
 Tel: +64 3 364 2976, Fax +64 3 364 2977, www.soci.canterbury.ac.nz

Wan Munira Wan Jaafar
 PhD. Candidate (Sociology)

Date:

CONSENT FORM

On-line Networks, Social Capital and Social Integration: A Case Study of On-line Communities in Malaysia

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. On this basis I agree to participate in the project, and I consent to an audio-taped interview with the understanding that all data will be securely stored and I consent to the publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved.

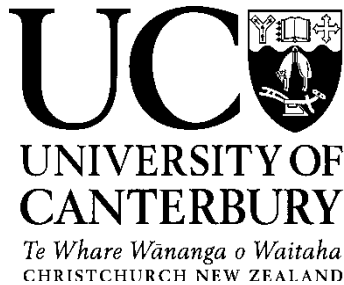
I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

I note that the project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and has received a Letter of Approval 'On Conducting the Research in Malaysia' from the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), Prime Minister's Department of Malaysia.

NAME (please print):
Signature:.....
Date:

Appendix 5I

Consent Form for the On-line Survey



School of Sociology and Anthropology
 College of Arts
 Tel: +64 3 364 2976, Fax +64 3 364 2977, www.soci.canterbury.ac.nz

Wan Munira Wan Jaafar
 PhD. Candidate (Sociology)

Date:

CONSENT FORM

On-line Networks, Social Capital and Social Integration: A Case Study of On-line Communities in Malaysia

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. On this basis I agree to allow my on-line community members to participate in the project, and I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved.

I understand also that I may at any time withdraw my permission of participation from the project, including withdrawal of any information that has been provided.

I note that the project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and has received a Letter of Approval 'On Conducting the Research in Malaysia' from the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), Prime Minister's Department of Malaysia.

NAME (please print):

Signature:.....

Date:

.....

Appendix 5J

An Invitation Letter for On-line Community Members

On-line Networks, Social Capital and Social Integration: A Case Study of On-line Communities in Malaysia

Dear all,

You're warmly invited to participate in a web-based survey that is being carried out to gauge your experience as a member of the [name of on-line community]. The aim of the project is to explore the possible impact of on-line social networks on social integration amongst on-line community members.

Please take this opportunity to share your experiences in this survey. As a sweetener, you can also enter a prize draw to win lots of popular New Zealand "All Blacks" merchandise and many other interesting souvenirs to thank you for your participation (one entry per participant completing the survey).

The project is being carried out as a requirement for a Ph.D. (Sociology) degree at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand by Wan Munira Wan Jaafar (wmj16@student.canterbury.ac.nz). The supervisors of this project are Professor David C. Thorns and Dr. Nabila Jaber who can be contacted at david.thorns@canterbury.ac.nz and nabila.jaber@canterbury.ac.nz respectively. They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

Your participation is purely voluntary and strict confidentiality will be maintained throughout this study. We will not name individuals or communities within our study. No information will be able to be traced back to you. You may withdraw your participation, including withdrawal of any information you have provided, until your questionnaire has been added to the others collected.

By completing the questionnaire it will be understood that you have consented to participate in the project, and that you consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved.

The project has been and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committees and has received a Letter of Approval 'On Conducting the Research in Malaysia' from the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), Prime Minister's Department of Malaysia.

The survey can be completed in 15 to 20 minutes. To take part, please log on to the survey site https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=20yxffe_2bTz4voVjJMA0Pcg_3d_3d

Thank you.

Kindly regards,

Wan Munira Wan Jaafar

Appendix 6A

Relevant Extracts from Prerequisite Clauses Provided by 5 Selected On-line Communities

Extract #1 Member Conduct of VirtualFriends.net

You agree not to use the service:

(b) Upload, post, publish, transmit, reproduce any

(ii) Content that violates or infringes in any way upon the rights of others, including Content which is inaccurate, false, hateful, threatening, abusive, offensive, harassing, unlawful, defamatory, libelous, tortuous, slanderous, invasive of privacy or publicity rights, vulgar, obscene, profane, or is racially, ethnically or is otherwise objectionable;

(iii) Content that is pornographic, sexually explicit or contains nudity;

(VirtualFriends.net,

2009)

Extract #2 Terms of Use of MalaysiaMAYA.com

By agreeing to these Terms, members affirm that they will not use this service to harass or abuse other members. Individuals who have demonstrably harassed other individuals via message boards, private messages, classifieds or using other means may be removed from MalaysiaMaya.com.

You are fully responsible for any content you post on the MalaysiMaya.com, including, but not limited to, photos, video, music, personal profile(s), message boards, classifieds, events, testimonials, e-mail messages and the consequences of such content.

You understand and agree that MalaysiaMaya.com may review from time to time and delete any content that violates this Agreement or which might be offensive, illegal, or harm the safety of or violate the rights of other users and members.

Content that is illegal or prohibited includes, but not limited to, material, text, graphic, videos or audio that:

- Is lawful, harassing, libelous, abusive, threatening, harmful, bigoted, racially offensive, obscene or otherwise objectionable
- Display sexuality explicit material of any kind in an area that is not categorized for Mature Content
- Is intended or designed to disrupt an ongoing conversation via flaming (a message in which the writer publicly attacks another participants in overly harsh, or personal terms) or trolling (deliberately posting derogatory or inflammatory comments in order to bait other users into responding)
- Encourages conduct that could constitute a criminal offences, give rise to civil liability or otherwise violate any applicable local, state, national or international law or regulation
- Transmit or posts any unsolicited or unauthorized advertising, “spam”, junk mail, “chain letter”. “Pyramid schemes”, etc.
- Transmit or posts any content that infringes upon patents, trademarks, trade secrets, copyrights or other proprietary rights
- Transmits or posts any viruses or material designed to disrupt, limit or destroy any functionality of any computer software or hardware of users, members or the MalaysiaMAYA.com
- Collects, stores or solicits information about others users of members for commercial or lawful purposes or engage in commercial such as contests, sweepstakes, etc. without MalaysiaMAYA.com prior consent
- Contains personally identifiable information about another member that is published without their express consent
- Contains material originally posted by another member that is reposted without permission or attribution
- Advertises any illegal services or the sale of any items prohibited or restricted by applicable law
- Has misleading email addresses or other manipulated identifiers to disguise its origin

MalaysiaMAYA.com considers the following content to be Mature:

- Nudity

- Explicitly sexual content – visual depictions or written descriptions
- Intense depictions or descriptions of violence or gore
- Obscene gestures
- Profanity that is sexual in nature or that is directed at another member
- Discussions or information about illicit substances

Note: Hate speech is not acceptable and will not be tolerated on MalaysiaMAYA.com. As defined by MalaysiaMAYA.com, hate speech may consist of symbols or images, as well as text.

MalaysiaMAYA.com defines sexually oriented contents as any material that depicts, in actual or simulated form, or explicitly describes, in a predominantly sexual context, human genitalia, any act of sexual intercourse, any act of sadism or masochism, or any other erotic subject directly related to foregoing.

MalaysiaMAYA.com reserves the right to refuse membership to anyone. MalaysiaMAYA.com may terminate your membership and any and all information, communications or postings, at any time, without notice, for conduct that violates this Agreement.

(MalaysiaMAYA.com, 2009)

Extract # 3 Forum Rules of USJ Subang Jaya

2. Be Civil

- a. No attacks, threats, insults, name-calling or inflamed speech for the sake of argument.
- b. Personal arguments must be carried out away from the public discussion forum and dealt with in private. Please use the Private Messaging (PM) and email systems instead.
- c. If you feel you have privately received a threat via e-mail, we ask you to contact to appropriate legal authorities. The administrator may only issue warnings or remove participants based on their public posts to a forum within the website. If you receive private communication from another participant that causes you

serious concern, you may communicate that to the moderator/administrator, but no action should be taken by the moderator/administrator to intervene in private disputes among individuals.

- d. Posts that are inaccurate, abusive, vulgar, hateful, harassing, obscene, sexually oriented, threatening, rude, mean, nasty, invasive of a person's privacy, or otherwise in violation of any law are not permitted. Members should contact the moderator/administrator via the report button or through the email and PM system.
- e. We expect long-standing ("veteran") members to understand and practice good behavior and thus lead by example and assist other newer members the appropriate way to use the Forum.
- f. Any member posting a comment deemed to be of the above description or are deemed attempts to incite others into unconstructive and abusive arguments (as determined by the moderators/administrators) will first be warned by PM. A warning is deemed to be given once a PM is sent, regardless if the member has read the message or not. The warning may include a request to publicly apologies for the offending comment.
- g. The moderator/administrator may provide guidance (in a public post) to the member to further develop a practical sense of what is appropriate and what is not allowed.
- h. If the member refuses to apologise or attempts a second offence, the member shall be suspended for a period of time to be determined by the administrator.
- i. If the member attempts a third offence, the member will be banned by the administrator.

4. Items Not Allowed

- a. No advertising of products or services on discussion channels. The website has provided specific areas for advertisements – please check the front page (Home) for these channels in order to post advertisements in the correct channels. Any advertisements in the wrong channels will be deleted by the administrators without prior warning.
- b. No chain letters. Any materials that request the reader to post it to multiple recipients will be deemed a chain letter.

- c. No SPAM. Members should not post empty or unrelated messages simply to annoy or increase a member's post count. This determination is made by the forum Moderator or Administrator and is not up for discussion.
- d. No Pornographic Materials. Any sexually oriented imagery or links to such content will not be tolerated.
- e. No illegal software or illegal content (which include pornography, music and videos). This includes hyperlinks to such illegal materials. Such post will be edited or deleted by the administrator without any warning.
- f. No avatar abuse is allowed. This includes the use of offensive pictures. The offending member will lose the right to use an avatar.

5. Textual Etiquette

- a. Don't quote the message that you're responding to, only the pertinent passage.
- b. Don't use all Capitals or uppercase letters in posting as this is equivalent to shouting and considered very rude.
- c. Please maintain short signatures in your postings. Do not include signature that serve primarily to promote a product or service. Do not include abusive language or inflammatory in your signatures.

6. Final Word

- a. If a topic appears to be breaking one of the above rules, please use the report button or email. This will alert a channel moderator that the topic needs to be moderated. Do not abuse the report system such as using the report system to talk to the moderators.
- b. Anyone deemed to be disrupting the Forum for whatever reason will be dealt with accordingly. The administrators will try their best to maintain the platform for sincere discussion and will prevent any attempts to degrade or devalue the quality of the forum.

Extract #4 Terms of Use of PJNet

6. Your Conduct

You agree that all information or data of any kind, whether text, software, code, music or sound, photographs or graphics, video or other materials (Content), publicly or

privately provided, shall be the sole responsibility of the person providing the Content or the person whose users account is used. You agree that our website may expose you to Content that may be objectionable or offensive. We shall not be responsible to you in any way for the Content that appears on this website nor for any error or omission.

You explicitly agree, in using this website or any service provided, that you shall not:

- a. Provide any Content or perform any conduct that may be unlawful, illegal, threatening, harmful, abusive, harassing, stalking, tortuous, defamatory, libelous, vulgar, obscene, offensive, objectionable, pornographic, designed to or does interfere or interrupt this website or any service provided, infected with a virus or other destructive or deleterious programming routine, give rise to civil or criminal liability, or which may violate an applicable local, national or international law;
- b. Impersonate or misrepresent your association with any person or entity, or forge or otherwise seek to conceal or misrepresent the origin of any Content provided by you;
- c. Collect or harvest any data about other users;
- d. Provide or use this website and any Content or service in any commercial manner or in any manner that would involve junk mail, spam, chain letters, pyramid schemes, commission, referral affiliate links or any other form of unauthorized advertising without our prior written consent;
- e. Provide any Content that may give rise to our civil or criminal liability or which may constitute or be considered a violation of any local, national or international law, including but not limited to laws relating to copyright, trademark, patent or trade secrets;
- f. Publish email or phone numbers excerpts of ANY type or length, all emails or phone numbers will be removed without exception;
- g. Post off-topic irrelevant threads in the forums.

(PJNet, 2009)

Extract #5 Terms of Use of SARA

By accessing “SARA: Setia Alam Resident’s Association” (hereinafter “we”, “us”, “our”, “SARA: Setia Alam Resident’s Association”, <http://forum.setialam.net>), you

agree to be legally bound by the following terms. If you do not agree to be legally bound by all of the following terms then please do not access and/or use “SARA: Setia Alam Resident’s Association”. We may change these at any time and we’ll do our utmost in informing you, thought it would be prudent to review this regularly yourself as your continued usage of “SARA: Setia Alam Resident’s Association” after changes mean you agree to be legally bound by these terms as they are updated and/or amended.

You agree not to post any abusive, vulgar, slanderous, hateful, threatening, sexually-oriented or any other material that may violate any laws be it of your country, the country where “SARA: Setia Alam Resident’s Association” is hosted or International Law. Doing so may lead to you being immediately and permanently banned, with notification of your Internet Service Provider if deemed required by us. The IP addresses of all posts are recorded to aid in enforcing these conditions. You agree that “SARA: Setia Alam Resident’s Association” has the right to remove, edit, move or close any topic at any time should we see fit. As a user you agree to any information you have entered to being stored in a database. While this information will not be disclosed to any party without your consent, neither “SARA: Setia Alam Resident’s Association” nor php BB shall be held responsible for any hacking attempt that may lead to the data being compromised.

(SARA, 2009)

Appendix 7A

Some Initial Principles in Loglinear Analysis

Loglinear analysis is a form of regression analysis for categorical data. It uses beta values to indicate the relative differences in frequencies across the tested categories. While the beta values in regression and ANOVA represented the difference between the means of a particular category compared to a base line category, beta values in loglinear analysis (particularly for categorical data) represent the difference in expected values. Just as in multiple regression and ANOVA, Loglinear analysis used in this analysis works as a linear model, which could be expanded according to how many variables are to be involved in the test. For example, if I have used three predictors to test here – Ethnicity, Language used and Inter-ethnic interaction (I have replace these with A, B and C respectively) – the model would end up with three two-way interactions (AB, AC, BC) and one three-way interaction ABC. Therefore, the resulting linear model used for this analysis is:

$$\ln(O_{ijk}) = (b_0 + b_1A_i + b_2B_j + b_3C_k + b_4AB_{ij} + b_5BC_{jk} + b_6ABC_{ijk} + \ln(\epsilon_{ijk}))$$

The model above is a little bit different to general linear models as in regression and ANOVA because a log value (indicated by ‘ln’) has been added and thus the outcome is also produced in terms of logs. Basically this model (used in regression, ANOVA and logliner analysis) has been expanded from the general linear form of the model as below:

$$\text{Outcome}_i = (\text{Model}_i) + \text{error}_i$$

The second consideration of this analysis that we should be aware of is that loglinear analysis works to fit a simpler model to the data without any substantial loss of predictive power. Therefore, loglinear analysis typically works on a principle of backwards elimination, as used in multiple regressions. It begins with the saturated model; SPSS will remove a predictor from the model and use this new model to predict the data (calculate expected frequencies, just like in the chi-squared test), and then see how well the model fits the data (i.e. are the expected frequencies close to the observed frequencies?). If the fit of new model is not very different from the more complex model, then the model could be abandoned in favor of the new one. Here, it is assumed

that the term removed did not have a significant impact on the ability of the created model to predict the observed data. In addition, the analysis does not just remove terms randomly, it does so hierarchically. Starting with the saturated model, the analysis will remove the highest order interaction (in this particular case, the three-way interaction – ABC) and assess the effect that this has. If removing the interaction term has no effect on the model then it's obviously not having much of an effect. The process will be continued with the next lower-order interaction (in this particular case, two-way interaction; AB, AC, BC) until an effect that does affect the fit of the model is found. Normally, this could be recognized by looking at the significant value and likelihood ratio statistic produced when the analysis compares expected frequencies and the observed frequencies for this particular interaction.

Details of Loglinear Analysis

To begin with the output tells us that we have 160 cases involved (79 Malays and 81 non-Malays, with 2 missing cases). SPSS then list all of the factors in the model and the number of the levels they have (in this case all have two levels). To begin with SPSS fits the saturated model (all terms are in the model including the highest-order interaction, in this case the ethnicities x language used x interact and communication off-line with multi-ethnic friends). SPSS then gives the observed and expected counts for each of the combinations of categories in the model. These values should be the same as the original contingency table, except that each cell has .5 added to it (this value is default and is fine). The final bit of this initial output gives out two goodness-of-fit statistics (Chi-squared and the likelihood ratio statistic). In this context these test are testing the hypothesis that the frequencies predicted by the model (the expected frequencies) are significantly different from the actual frequencies in the data (the observed frequencies). Obviously, the model is a good of fit of the data because the observed and expected frequencies are very similar (i.e. not significantly different)¹. At this stage, this model perfectly predicts the data and thus allows for the next step of analysis.

¹ We actually want these statistics to be non-significant. A significant result would mean that our model was significantly different from our data (i.e. the model is a bad fit of the data).

Table A: SPSS Output for Loglinear Analysis Part 1

***** HIERARCHICAL LOG LINEAR *****					
Data Information					
162 unweighted cases accepted					
0 cases rejected because of out-of-range factor values					
0 cases rejected because of missing data					
160 weighted cases will be used in the analysis					
Factor Information					
Factor		Level		Label	
ETHNICITY		2		Ethnic group	
LANGUAGE		2		Language used	
INTERACTION		2		Do you interact and communicate off-line with multi-ethnic friends made on-line?	
DESIGN 1 has generating class					
ETHNICITY * LANGUAGE * INTERACTION					
Note: For saturated model .500 has been added to all observed cells. This value may be changed by using the CRITERIA = DELTA subcommand					
The Iterative Proportional Fit algorithm converged at iteration 1. The maximum difference between observed and fitted marginal total is .000 and the convergence criterion is .250					
Observed, Expected Frequencies and Residuals					
Factor	Code	OBS Count	EXP Count	Residual	Std Residual
ETHNICITY	Malay				
LANGUAGE	MALAY				
INTERACT	Yes	24.5	24.5	.00	.00
INTERACT	No	5.5	5.5	.00	.00
LANGUAGE	Other Languages				
INTERACT	Yes	41.5	25.9	.00	.00
INTERACT	No	9.5	5.9	.00	.00
ETHNICITY	Non-Malay				
LANGUAGE	Malay				
INTERACT	Yes	.500	.500	.00	.00
INTERACT	No	.500	.500	.00	.00

LANGUAGE	Other Languages				
INTERACT	Yes	46.5	46.5	.00	.00
INTERACT	No	35.5	35.5	.00	.00
Goodness-of-fit test statistics					
Likelihood ratio chi-square	= .00000	DF = 0	P = -INF		
Chi square	= .00000	DF = 0	P = -INF		

The next part of the output (see Table B: Backward Elimination Statistic – Step Summary) tells us something about which components of the model can be removed according to Backward Elimination Statistics. Basically, the hierarchical loglinear procedure will automatically screen all possible models in a generating class hierarchy for the most parsimonious one. The backward elimination algorithm will drop the least useful terms one step at a time². Backward Elimination Statistics as in Table B show that the elimination process has started with the saturation model. Thus, Step 0 is for Ethnicity*Language*Interaction and all hierarchically subsidiary 2nd and 1st order terms. In step 0, the backward elimination algorithm tests to see if the highest order (here, 3rd order) term may be dropped from the model as non-significant. At Sig. = .990, it is indeed non-significant and is dropped, leading to Step 1. Step 1 is the model with all 2nd order (two-way) terms and the subsidiary 1st order term. Since here three factors correspond to three two-way interactions, each of the three is tested for possible dropping. It is found that Language*Interaction is non-significant and may be dropped, but the other two 2nd order terms should be retained. In step 2, Language*Interaction is dropped and the remaining two 2nd order interactions (Ethnicity*Language and Ethnicity*Interaction) are used as the generating class. This time no terms are found suitable for dropping (none are found to be non-significant). Step 3, the final step, merely lists the generating class for the most parsimonious hierarchical model. It actually tells that the model that best fits the data did not include the three-way interaction (Ethnicity*Language*Interaction) but has included two out of three two-way

² “Least useful” is operationalised as the term whose removal has the least effect on lowering the likelihood ratio chi-squared (recall lower = more toward significance = bad fit).

interactions (Ethnicity*Language and Ethnicity*Interaction), the important effects that need to be interpreted.

In the final step, output under backward elimination, SPSS produced the likelihood ratio chi squared and its significance for the model as a whole (See Table C). A non-significant likelihood ratio indicates a good fit, as is the case in this analysis (Sig. = .996) where non-significance corresponds to a well-fitting model for the analysis. This also tells that the expected values generated by the model are not significantly different from the observed data.

Table B: Backward Elimination Statistic – Step Summary

Step ^b		Effects	Chi-Square ^a	df	Sig.	Number of Iterations
0	Generating Class ^c	Ethnicity*Language*Interact	.000	0	.	
	Deleted Effect	Ethnicity*Language*Interact	.000	1	.990	2
1	Generating Class ^c	Ethnicity*Language, Ethnicity*Interact, Language*Interact	.000	1	.990	
	Deleted Effect	Ethnicity*Language	44.336	1	.000	2
		Ethnicity*Interact	9.294	1	.002	2
		Language*Interact	.007	1	.933	2
2	Generating Class ^c	Ethnicity*Language, Ethnicity*Interact	.007	2	.996	
		Ethnicity*Language	47.583	1	.000	2
		Ethnicity*Interact	12.541	1	.000	2
3	Generating Class ^c	Ethnicity*Language, Ethnicity*Interact	.007	2	.996	

a. For 'Deleted Effect', this is the change in the Chi-Squared after the effect is deleted from the model.

b. At each step, the effect with the largest significance level for the Likelihood Ratio Change is deleted, provided the significance level is larger than .050.

c. Statistics are displayed for the best model at each step after step 0.

Table C: Goodness-of-Fit Tests

	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Likelihood Ratio	.007	2	.996
Pearson	.007	2	.996